

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJR 8208

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks, January 29, 2024

Brief Description: Enshrining the right to hunt and fish in the state Constitution.

Sponsors: Senators Wagoner, Boehnke, Fortunato, Keiser, Schoesler, Short and Wilson, L..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/22/24, 1/29/24
[DP, DNP, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Proposes a Constitutional amendment to preserve the right to forage, hunt, fish, trap, and harvest wildlife and fish.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Van De Wege, Chair; Muzzall, Ranking Member; Short, Wagoner and Warnick.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Stanford.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Salomon, Vice Chair; Liias and Shewmake.

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) operates under a statutory mandate to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage Washington's wildlife, food fish,

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game fish, and shellfish. The Department of Fish and Wildlife has been delegated the responsibility to carry out this mandate at the direction of the Commission, which includes establishing basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife.

To amend the Constitution, the amendment must be approved by two-thirds of the members elected to each house of the Legislature, and then approved by a majority of the voters in the next general election.

Summary of Bill: A Constitutional amendment is proposed adding that all the people of this state shall have an inalienable right to forage, hunt, fish, trap, and harvest wildlife and fish, subject only to reasonable regulation as prescribed by the Washington State Legislature and executive branch. The amendment provides that traditional methods, practices, and procedures of harvest are the preferred means of managing game and fish. The amendment may not be construed to modify any provision of common law or statutes relating to trespass, eminent domain, or any other property rights. The amendment does not supersede, limit, interpret, or infringe upon any established tribal treaty rights.

The Secretary of State must give proper notice of the constitutional amendment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 17, 2024.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The bill would send to the people an opportunity to enshrine hunting, fishing, and the right to gather in the constitution. Hunting and fishing is a fundamental and inalienable right that is part of our heritage. Hunters and fishers are the original conservationists. The proposal is not an anti-conservation proposal. Wildlife is here because of hunting and fishing. Hunting and fishing opportunities are being reduced, and there needs to be protections into the future. Modern hunting is sustainable, and people need to maintain their connection to nature.

CON: The proposal eliminates the opportunity for people to participate in the process and deprives voters of the right to use the initiative process on future changes. Hunters and fishers are a smaller percentage of the population, and more people want to be able to enjoy wildlife viewing opportunities. Sustainable and science-based biology should be used to manage our fish and wildlife populations. This bill would result in lawsuits over what are reasonable policies. The bill is not necessary, there is no threat to hunting and fishing. The changes in the bill could harm endangered species.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Keith Wagoner, Prime Sponsor; Dane Czarnecki; Mike Herz; Kelsey Ross; Brian Barcus; Nicholas Larson; Thomas Eidson; Jon Dykes; Brant MacDuff, Conservation historian & economist; Michael Costello; Trevor Guyton, Bremerton Sportsmen's Club.

CON: Claire Davis, Washington Wildlife First; Hannah Thompson-Garner, Northwest Animal Rights Network (NARN); David Linn, None; Ronald Reed; Dan Paul, The Humane Society of the United States; An Prezyna; Joshua Rosenau, Mountain Lion Foundation; Michelle Lute, Wildlife for All; Susan D Kane-Ronning, PHD, Washington Sierra Club Wildlife Committee; John Rosapepe, Endangered Species Coalition; Lloyd Lytle.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: PRO: Ryan Garrett; Will Christison-Williamson; Matthew McCauley.