

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5612

*As Passed House
April 19, 1991*

Title: An act relating to natural resources conservation areas.

Brief Description: Changing provisions relating to natural resources conservation areas.

Sponsor(s): Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Bluechel, Snyder, Metcalf and Stratton; by request of Department of Natural Resources).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Natural Resources & Parks, April 4, 1991, DPA;
Passed House, April 19, 1991, 98-0.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* Signed by 11 members: Representatives Belcher, Chair; Scott, Vice Chair; Beck, Ranking Minority Member; Brumsickle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dellwo; Fraser; Hargrove; Morton; Riley; Sheldon; and Wynne.

Staff: Randy Acker (786-7129).

Background: In 1987, the Legislature established the Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) program within the Department of Natural Resources, to protect and conserve areas that have retained their natural character to some degree, or that contain important biological, geological, archaeological, or other special features. Land acquisition was financed by proceeds from a 0.06 percent surcharge on real estate excise taxes through June 30, 1989.

NRCA land can be acquired through private purchases at fair market value, trust land transfers, or purchased through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program Fund (WWRP). NRCAs are managed for limited, but compatible, public uses such as maintaining ecological systems, maintaining scenic landscapes, maintaining habitat for threatened or endangered species, enhancing sites for primitive recreational

purposes, and outdoor environmental education. NRCA management can include limited production of income from forestry, agriculture, or other activities consistent with the program's objectives.

Modifications to the NRCA chapter are needed to clarify the program's intent, to repeal language related to the excise tax that is no longer collected, and to authorize using the remainder of the funds generated by the excise tax for management purposes.

Summary of Bill: Low-impact public uses are authorized within Natural Resources Conservation Areas (NRCA) and are defined as recreational uses that do not adversely affect resource values, are appropriate to maintaining a natural setting, and that do not detract from long-term ecological processes. Prior to establishing the boundary of a NRCA, a public hearing must be held in the county where the majority of the land is located.

The NRCA stewardship account can only be used to (1) manage NRCAs, (2) manage natural area preserves, (3) manage trust lands transferred to the program or lands acquired as NRCAs under 43.98A RCW (Habitat Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Lands), and (4) pay operating expenses of the Natural Heritage Program in the Department of Natural Resources.

The section establishing the conservation area account is repealed. The remaining funds in the account are transferred to the NRCA stewardship account.

Fiscal Note: Requested March 26, 1991.

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

Testimony For: The bill will improve DNR's ability to manage natural resources conservation areas. It will help to increase opportunities for greater use of NRCAs.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Dan Wood, Citizens for Responsible Resource Use; and Stan Biles, Department of Natural Resources.