

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5612

C 352 L 91

SYNOPSIS AS ENACTED

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

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

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

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:

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.

Funds eligible for deposit into the NRCA stewardship account are expanded to include grants and income from NRCA management. Two million dollars of the account balance must remain in the account as an endowment.

The section establishing the conservation area account is repealed.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

The NRCA stewardship account can only be used for management of NRCAs, trust land transfers, lands acquired as natural preserves, lands acquired for the NRCA program by the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, and for the operating expenses of the natural heritage program.

Contingent upon funding in the Omnibus Appropriations Act, the Union Bay cooperative wildlife habitat management area is established at the Union Bay wetland area east of the Lake Washington ship canal. The Department of Wildlife is directed to coordinate a cooperative planning effort for the area, to include all interested property owners and managers within or adjacent to the area as well as other interested parties.

The Department of Wildlife and cooperators are directed to identify wildlife resources, educational opportunities, and management objectives for the area and to develop a plan for co-management. The Department of Wildlife shall provide progress reports to the House Fisheries and Wildlife and the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committees by December 1, 1991 and December 1, 1992. The Department of Wildlife may accept gifts, grants and other funds for the purposes of coordinating the planning effort.

VOTES ON FINAL PASSAGE:

Senate	48	0	
House	98	0	(House amended)
Senate			(Senate refused to concur)
House			(House refused to recede)

Conference Committee

House	98	0
Senate	46	1

EFFECTIVE: July 28, 1991
(Section 12 is null and void since no appropriation was made in the budget.)