

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5204

As Reported by House Committee On:
Fisheries, Ecology & Parks

Title: An act relating to enhancing watchable wildlife activities.

Brief Description: Providing opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Parks, Fish & Wildlife (originally sponsored by Senators Oke, Doumit, T. Sheldon, Jacobsen, Swecker, Kohl-Welles and Esser; by request of Department of Fish and Wildlife).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Fisheries, Ecology & Parks: 3/21/03, 3/28/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Fish and Wildlife to design and market a Watchable Wildlife decal, the proceeds of which are to be used for enhancing non-consumptive wildlife activities in the state.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, ECOLOGY & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Cooper, Chair; Berkey, Vice Chair; Sump, Ranking Minority Member; Hinkle, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buck, Hatfield, O'Brien, Pearson and Upthegrove.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

I. Watchable Wildlife

"Watchable Wildlife" is a term that refers to non-consumptive wildlife activities. The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) manages both the state's consumptive game species, such as deer and elk, and the state's non-game, or "watchable" species, such as songbirds, frogs, and butterflies.

Management of both game and non-game species is generally funded by the General Fund and the State Wildlife Fund. The monies collected by the DFW from the sale of various licenses, fees, and properties are deposited into the State Wildlife Fund. In addition, the State Wildlife Fund receives the revenue collected by the Department of Licensing (Licensing) from the sale of personalized license plates. The money that is collected by Licensing must be used for the preservation, protection, perpetuation, and enhancement of non-game species of wildlife.

II. Lands Access/Conservation Patrons

Any individual who wishes to enter or use land owned and improved by the DFW must display a current vehicle use permit. An annual permit can be purchased for \$10 and may be transferred between two vehicles. One vehicle use permit is provided without charge to an individual purchasing an annual hunting, fishing, or trapping license.

In addition to license purchasers, any person opting to become a "conservation patron" also receives a vehicle use permit free of charge. Conservation patrons are individuals who donate money to the DFW for the sound stewardship of fish and wildlife. A minimum donation of \$20 is required to qualify for the complimentary vehicle use permit.

Money collected by the sale of the vehicle use permits must be used for the maintenance and stewardship of the DFW improved access facilities.

Summary of Bill:

In place of the "conservation patrons" program, the DFW is authorized to sell Watchable Wildlife decals. The minimum price for a decal must be set in rule; however, a customer may voluntarily pay more than the minimum price. Individuals purchasing a decal will also receive a vehicle use permit at no additional cost. Proceeds from the sale of the decals must be deposited into the State Wildlife Fund and be used exclusively for the DFW's Watchable Wildlife activities. Permissible use of the funds include:

- Initiating partnerships with local communities to develop wildlife watching projects and to assist with conducting wildlife watching events;
- Building infrastructure to assist wildlife viewing;
- Developing wildlife viewing destinations and tourism materials;
- Offering grants to rural communities to help them locate and identify key wildlife attractions; and
- Marketing the decal.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The DFW has been hearing for some time that there is a need for a mechanism that allows non-consumptive wildlife users to financially contribute to the funding of the DFW. The current avenues for capturing that revenue have proved to be unsuccessful, and most of the DFW's funding still comes from consumptive users.

Funds from the decal could be used to enter into partnerships with local communities and landowners to help identify viewing opportunities and address local wildlife viewing issues.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Steve Pozzanghera, Department of Fish and Wildlife.