
**Fisheries, Ecology & Parks
Committee**

HB 1512

Brief Description: Allowing special hunts to reduce crop damage caused by wildlife.

Sponsors: Representatives Cox, Fromhold, Sump, Schoesler, Hatfield, Ahern, Clements and Armstrong.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Fish and Wildlife Commission to issue at least two doe permits per hunter for special hunts to be conducted in areas where the Department Of Fish and Wildlife has confirmed six incidents of agricultural and horticultural crop damage caused by deer or elk.
- Requires the Department of Fish and Wildlife to utilize a list of available local hunters when selecting participants for a special hunt.

Hearing Date: 2/14/03

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The Legislature has stated in statute that wildlife is a public resource of significant value, and that the minimization of conflicts between humans and wildlife is a responsibility shared by all citizens of the state. The Legislature has also found that commercial crop production and healthy deer and elk populations are both important. However, healthy wildlife populations can cause damage to crops (RCW 77.36.005). Provisions in current law address this conflict between agriculture and wildlife.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) is instructed to work closely with landowners to find non-lethal solutions to problem wildlife. However, if such efforts are not practical, the Department is authorized to increase the harvest of damage-causing animals during the hunting season. The Department also has the discretionary authorized to conduct special hunts in problem areas as a result of recurring complaints regarding property being damaged by wildlife (RCW 77.36.020).

In addition to special hunts, the owner or tenant of real property being damaged by wildlife is authorized to trap or kill problem wildlife that is causing damage to crops. However, that permission does not extend to endangered or threatened species, or to deer and elk. Problem deer and elk may only be killed with a take permit issued by the Department, unless the situation is an emergency and the Department has given the landowner verbal permission to harvest the deer or elk. On cattle ranching land, the owner may only declare an emergency if the Department does not respond within 48 hours of notification. Even if an emergency situation exists, the owners of cattle ranching land may not kill the problem wildlife if they did not make the land available for public hunting during the previous hunting season (RCW 77.36.030).

The Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) is authorized to conduct special hunts in areas where game populations exist at a level that damages property or over-utilizes the habitat. The Commission's authority includes the ability to identify the number and sex of animals that are allowed to be taken. The Director of the Department is required to determine a selection system for the hunters allowed to participate in a special season that ensures a random selection (RCW 77.12.150).

Summary of Bill:

Special Hunts

The Commission is directed to authorize the issuance of at least two doe permits per hunter for special hunts to be conducted in areas where the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has confirmed six incidents of agricultural and horticultural crop damage caused by deer or elk. Complaints must be received from the owner or tenant of real property, or from several owners or tenants in the same locale.

Hunter Selection

The Department is required to maintain a list of persons holding valid wildlife hunting licenses, arranged by county of residence, who have indicated they are available to hunt deer or elk causing damage to crops. Individuals on the list must meet all the qualifications established by the Department and the Department must update the list at least once every three years. When contacting people to help control game damage to crops, the Department must use the list and must make all reasonable efforts to use a resident of the county where the hunt will occur before contacting a resident of a different county. The names on the list must be rotated in order to provide a fair distribution of the hunting opportunities. Hunters participating in these hunts must report their kills to the Department, and the information provided must be included in a summary of the wildlife harvested that is available to the public.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill

is passed.