

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5657

As of February 14, 2013

Title: An act relating to state parks and recreation.

Brief Description: Concerning state parks and recreation.

Sponsors: Senators Pearson, Parlette, Rolfes and Schlicher.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 2/12/13.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: State Parks Operations and Funding. The State Parks and Recreation Commission (State Parks) manages a system that includes 117 developed parks stretching across approximately 120,000 acres throughout the state.

Between 2001 and 2011, the Legislature took a number of policy and fiscal actions related to the funding of State Parks. These include, at various times, the use of funding mechanisms including parking fees, voluntary donations, and various fund transfers for the support of State Parks. During that period, the state general fund (GF-S) support ranged from a high of \$95 million in the 2007-2009 biennium to a low of \$41 million in the 2009-2011 biennium.

In 2011, the Legislature created the Discover Pass and generally required its purchase for access to state recreation lands, including state parks. The 2011 Operating Budget provided one-time funding of approximately \$17 million of GF-S funds to assist State Parks to move toward the goal of becoming a self-supporting agency. Due to lower than expected Discover Pass revenue, State Parks received an additional \$4 million in one-time funding from state aquatic lands revenue in 2012. While initial 2011 projections estimated approximately \$64 million in Discover Pass revenue for the biennium, actual revenue totaled about \$15.7 million for fiscal year 2012.

State Parks Commission Terms. The State Parks Commission consists of seven members appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Commissioners serve six-year terms that expire on December 31 of even-numbered years.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

State Parks Pass Programs. The statutorily created State Parks pass programs provide free access to and either free or discounted camping at State Parks to those who qualify for a senior citizen's pass, a disability pass, a lifetime veteran's disability pass, or a foster home pass.

Recreational Access Pass Account (RAPA). In adopting the Discover Pass, the Legislature also created the the RAPA which accepts revenues from the sale of Discover Passes and Day-Use Permits. For the first \$71 million in revenue collected each fiscal biennium:

- 8 percent is deposited into the State Wildlife Account for use by the Department of Fish and Wildlife;
- 8 percent is deposited into the Park Land Trust Revolving Account for use by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR); and
- 84 percent is deposited in the State Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account for use by State Parks.

All revenues exceeding \$71 million each fiscal biennium are distributed equally amongst the agencies. Each agency has different allowed uses for the revenue; however, generally, the revenue may be used for operations and maintenance of recreation areas.

Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program (Grant Program). In 2007, the Legislature created the Grant Program to provide opportunities for public agencies, nonprofit organizations, schools, and community-based programs to receive grants. The Grant Program must focus on students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, are most likely to fail academically, or have the greatest potential to drop out of school. Grant priorities and criteria are developed by State Parks, based on specific statutory guidance.

Summary of Bill: The Timing of State Park Commission Term Expiration is Modified. The terms of State Parks Commissioners expire on June 30 of odd-numbered years instead of December 31 of even-numbered years.

Certain Complementary Discover Passes and Pass Exemptions are Provided.

- *Persons Eligible for State Parks Pass Programs.* Free access to State Parks for participants under the State Parks pass programs is eliminated, but those eligible for the pass programs qualify for a complementary Discover Pass.
- *Persons Eligible for Food Stamps.* Any state resident who is the registered owner of a vehicle and provides proof of eligibility for food stamps qualifies for a complementary Discover Pass.
- *Married Spouse Volunteers.* Married spouses may combine hours for purposes of the requirement to accrue 24 volunteer hours before qualifying for a complementary Discover Pass.
- *Vehicles with a State Parks Special Plate.* A Discover Pass is not required in a state park for a vehicle displaying a state parks special plate.

Transfers from the GF-S for Specified Purposes are Provided. Each year on September 1, a series of transfers from the GF-S must occur for specified purposes. These include transfers representing:

- an amount equal to the sales of Discover Passes and Day-Use Permits, to be deposited in and distributed under the RAPA;

- an amount equal to the value of complementary Discover Passes provided to persons eligible for food stamps and the State Parks pass programs, to be deposited in and distributed under the RAPA. However, the first million dollars transferred for this purpose goes to the Outdoor Education and Recreation Grant Program; and
- an amount equal to the value of campsite rental and reservation revenues foregone in the preceding fiscal year due to the State Parks pass programs, to be deposited in the State Parks Renewal and Stewardship Account;

The Outdoor Education Grant Program to Include Recreation Land Access is Expanded. A new component to the Grant Program is established to provide access to state recreation lands for youth for which the Discover Pass creates a financial barrier. Grants may be provided to nonprofit organizations for programs that provide this access.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 7, 2013.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill will continue to support State Parks programs which provide educational experience in regards to Washington State cultural diversity. Further, it protects a broad agency role to develop needed private support for State Parks. This bill is focused on influencing GF-S contributions to leverage Discover Pass sales, honoring previous commitments that have been made to State Parks.

OTHER: DNR would like to be named as an entity on the committee that this bill creates so they can address youth and recreational outdoor activities. This bill could create confusion with existing pass programs and affect funding for state recreation lands.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Kirk Pearson, Jill Linzee, Northwest Heritage Resources; Peter Reid, Washington State Parks Foundation; Jim Richards, Washington Wildlife & Recreation Coalition (WWRC); Joe Mentor, Elliott Marks, WWRC Seattle; Lukas Peter, Jim King, Citizens for Parks and Recreation; Stet Palmer, Marcia Smith, Janie Brumfield, Gregory Johnson, Helen Hepp, Nancy Messemer, Friends of Schafer and Lake Sylvia State Parks; Roy Morris, Friends of Hoko River State Park; Betty Tabbutt, League of Women Voters; Daniel Farber, State Parks; Catherine Curley, National Wildlife Federation; Brian Yearout, WA Federation of State Employees; Kris Tucker, WA State Arts Commission.

OTHER: Kyle Blum, DNR; Greg Schirato, Department of Fish and Wildlife.