

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5405

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, February 11, 2015

Title: An act relating to creating a task force to examine land ownership by the federal government in Washington.

Brief Description: Creating a task force to examine land ownership by the federal government in Washington.

Sponsors: Senators Pearson, Danel and Warnick.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 2/04/15, 2/11/15 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5405 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Danel, Vice Chair; Hatfield, Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Hewitt, McAuliffe and Warnick.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: According to the Washington Public Lands Inventory completed by the Recreation and Conservation Office in 2014, there are a total of approximately 45.7 million acres in the state. Of those lands, approximately:

- 12.7 million acres are in federal ownership;
- 6.5 million acres are in state natural resource ownership; and
- 622,000 are in county and city ownership.

Of the federal acreage, a congressional study using information from 2010 identified approximately:

- 9.3 million acres managed by the United States Forest Service;
- 1.8 million acres managed by the National Park Service;
- 182,000 acres managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service; and
- 429,000 acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

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.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): A task force is established to study the risks, options, and benefits of transferring certain federal lands in the state to an alternative ownership. Specifically, the task force must:

- review the management of federal lands in the state and compare environmental outcomes of federal and state land management;
- review potential risks, options, and benefits of transferring United States Forest Service lands in the state to an alternative ownership such as state, county, tribal, or nonprofit ownership;
- recommend whether the state should continue to investigate and pursue federal land transfers; and
- identify issues and recommendations for improving the responsiveness of federal land management to specified needs and interests of Washington.

The task force may not consider or recommend federal land transfers to private ownership or a transfer of wilderness areas, national parks, or military installations.

Findings and recommendations of the task force must be reported to the Governor and appropriate legislative committees by October 31, 2016.

Membership on the task force includes the following:

- two members from the House of Representatives;
- two members from the Senate;
- representatives from an eastern Washington county, western Washington county, conservation interests, forest landowner interests, recreational interests, and ranching or agricultural interests;
- representatives of the Governor and specified state agencies; and
- invited tribal participation.

Legislative committee staff must provide staffing for the task force. At the task force's request, the Governor's office and participating state agencies must also provide assistance. Other administrative provisions, including for task force expenses are included.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute):

- Includes forest landowner, recreational, and State Parks and Recreation Commission representation on the task force.
- Directs the task force to identify issues and recommendations for improving the responsiveness of federal land management to specified needs and interests of Washington.
- Modifies the intent section to recognize the state's track record of considering local and stakeholder input.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: The bill addresses concerns about payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) funding. Counties not receiving the expected and budgeted amount of PILT will experience major budget cuts and job loss. Counties could not plan 2014 without PILT funding as their budgets had already been severely cut due to economic factors resulting in job loss. Counties receive PILT because of lack of forest management/harvest by the USFS.

CON: There are concerns about the impacts of this study on other projects and analysis. Transfer of lands from the federal government to state governments could take away from more productive discussions.

OTHER: The study is a valid endeavor, but should include recreationists and evaluate federal land management.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Wes McCart, Stevens County Commissioner; Karen Skoog, Stevens County Commissioner; Jon Wyss, Okanagan County Farm Bureau; Mike Blankenship, Ferry County.

CON: Mo McBroom, The Nature Conservancy.

OTHER: Terry Kohl, Backcountry Horsemen.