

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5696

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks, February 21, 2019

Title: An act relating to payments in lieu of real property taxes.

Brief Description: Concerning payments in lieu of real property taxes.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick and Takko.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 2/07/19, 2/21/19 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Amends the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) payment in lieu of property taxes (PILT) rate.
- Provides that, if a county elects to receive PILT for eligible game lands, the state treasurer, on behalf of DFW, must distribute to counties PILT that is equal to 50 percent of the assessed value, divided by 1000, multiplied by the local levy rate, less the state levy portion.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Van De Wege, Chair; Salomon, Vice Chair; Warnick, Ranking Member; McCoy, Rolfes and Short.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Honeyford.

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: DFW makes payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) on lands it owns to counties that have elected to receive it. A receiving county must distribute PILT to local taxing districts based on the location of the property. Game lands eligible for DFW PILT includes all DFW-

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owned tracts used for wildlife habitat and public recreational purposes. DFW buildings, structures, facilities, game farms, fish hatcheries, water access sites, tidelands, and public fishing areas are ineligible.

For the 2013-15 and 2015-17 fiscal biennia, the Legislature fixed the amount of PILT paid to each county based on the PILT received in 2009. For the 2017-2019 fiscal biennia, the Legislature set a fixed amount of PILT and then established payments to counties on a percentage basis. Prior to 2012, counties chose one of the following two formulas to calculate DFW PILT:

- the tax that would be due if the property were taxed as open space land; or
- the greater of either \$0.70 per acre or the PILT amount paid in 1984—this choice requires that PILT was received in 1984.

If a county elects to receive PILT, it must track the amount of fees, fines, and forfeitures received from fish and game violations and send an equivalent amount to the state treasurer for deposit into the state general fund. Counties need not track the fees, fines, and forfeitures information while the rate remains frozen at the 2009 level.

Summary of Bill: If a county elects to receive PILT for eligible game lands, the state treasurer, on behalf of DFW, must distribute to counties PILT equal to 50 percent of the assessed value, divided by 1000, multiplied by the local levy rate, less the state levy portion. The county must provide a list to DFW of the eligible parcels, assessed value, and local levy rate by December 31st for payment the following year. The amounts of fish and wildlife fines collected by counties that receive PILT are no longer deposited into the state general fund. The 2013-2015, 2015-2017, and 2017-2019 PILT rates are deleted.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Counties, especially rural area counties, are struggling, and PILT has been an uncertainty for counties. This bill will help clarify how much PILT counties will receive from the state treasurer. The DFW PILT coalition, formed in 2015, was organized to consider some common concerns about the DFW PILT program. The state currently operates two PILT programs one by DNR and one by DFW. This bill aligns the two programs in three ways: the payments, funding, and responsibility for payments is moved to the State Treasurer's Office, counties no longer have to choose between receiving fines and fees related to DFW violations in their county or receiving PILT, and the method for calculating PILT is aligned with the DNR program by using the local open space rate to calculate PILT. These payments are critical to continuing to allow counties to provide the services that protect public health, safety, and welfare in their communities. When DFW buys land, it places a disproportionate tax burden on the local taxpayers because the land is no longer taxable. Without PILT, the local population pays the ongoing costs for services on public lands that benefit everyone. The county assessors have

agreed to standardize their methodology for how PILT is calculated. A standard methodology means there will be fair PILT calculations for counties that receive DFW PILT. This bill is a fair and reasonable approach to fulfill DFW's obligation to local governments for the tax implications of DFW land ownership. This bill develops a single calculation that brings clarity and predictability to these payments and works in everyone's best interest.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Judy Warnick, Prime Sponsor; Paul Jewell, Washington State Association of Counties; Bill Clarke, Kittitas County; Josh Weiss, Yakima County; Mo McBroom, The Nature Conservancy; Steve Stewart, WWRC; Cynthia Wilkerson, DFW; Rick Hughes, San Juan County; Lisa Olsen, Pacific County.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.