

OVCBCHW

Legislative Report

April 30, 2012

Discover Pass

The session is finally over. We have a budget that passed with one one getting all that they wanted or thought they needed. The Discover Pass bill that we have been actively working on for months passed the legislature. The governor has signed the bill (finally).

There were a few changes in the final bill from the Senate and House versions I have reported to you throughout the session, so I want you to know exactly what passed.

1. 2-vehicle transferability for \$30 per year; one-vehicle use of the pass at a time. There would be spaces on the pass to write in two vehicle license numbers, and only those vehicles could use that pass. You could not bring two vehicles into the park at the same time with one pass. This would take place immediately and retroactively for all folks who have already purchased a pass. No refunds for those who have already purchased two passes would be allowed.
2. Flexibility on when the Discover Pass activation starts (will make gifting easier). It will be up to the three agencies to agree on how to do activation for periods different from the sales date. It will take time to come up with specific policies and procedures, so until further notice, the activation time is still the date of sale. (Note that there is currently some time offset with DOL and other sales and that will continue.)
3. Expansion to all of DNR's uplands which would be subject to the pass requirement.

4. Broadening locations and methods of sale.
5. Provides as an option that the agencies may choose to offer a \$50 fully transferable pass that is called a “Family Discover Pass.” The word “family” is a misnomer, in that the pass could be used by anyone, inside the same household or not. Again, it would only be for one vehicle at a time. Implementation of this provision is also not immediate. The three agencies need to come up with many policies and procedures, and agree to sales price, prior to implementation.
6. Special Events could, at the discretion of the agency, be exempt from the Discover Pass, if they pay other fees to state parks. (This is a complex implementation task for the 3 agencies involved, they are balancing our public service and revenue objectives. The legislation gives discretion, but each agency is still working the details.) It is not clear yet how this will be implemented at the DNR.
7. Expands the existing Opt-Out vehicle donation program to additional vehicles (like snowmobiles, mopeds, and ¾ ton pick-up trucks.)
8. Contains an emergency clause to have it enforced immediately upon the governor’s signature.

Other elements that were part of earlier versions of the bill that did NOT get adopted include:

1. Expanding Disabled Veteran’s free access to WDFW and DNR lands.
2. Directing Hotel/Motel Tax receipts from State Parks lodging and camping to go back to State Parks.
3. Creating a 3-year temporary \$10 RV license surcharge.
4. Wholesaling of the pass.
5. Eliminating requirement to get a Discover Pass if visitor already has a Sno-Park day pass. Thus, there is no change from the existing requirement for a Discover Pass on state recreation lands for those people holding a day Sno-Park permit.

It is also important to note that earlier the legislature passed a bill that transfers Discover Pass citation fines to the joint agency Discover Pass account. State Parks receives 84% of these revenues. The fines have been going to counties for court administration.

As you know we worked diligently with other groups to save the non-highway gas tax funds from being swept. For us, that was saving NOVA, and we were successful with help from our friends. There are three funds paid from non-highway gas tax use, and while NOVA is the one that most benefits our use, there are also the snowmobile fund and the boaters (RRA) fund. As fate would have it, the boaters (RRA) were not so fortunate and are having 3 million of their 8 million proposed to be swept.

This is NOT okay. The boaters worked with us both on the NOVA lid lift legislation and preserving the three funds. Another sweep of any of these funds is a potential risk to all of us in the future should this trend continue (the boaters RRA fund was also swept when the NOVA account was last raided). Also there is a good chance RTP will be a state managed gas tax fund in the future.

We were asked to voice our comments to the USFS concerning the Suiattle River Road Environmental Assessment by the 20th. I hope many of you did comment.

In response to the hounding of a 700 member group of radical environmental nut cases in California who have the stated goal of removing horses from 2 national parks in California, a Federal judge has issued a unilateral order in their favor. The house Natural resources committee has pushed through legislation to block this order. It passed the US House. We have been asked to contact our 2 senators. Here are the talking points provided by BCHA:

1. H.R. 4849 was introduced just two days ago as an emergency measure to save jobs and access for longstanding backcountry horsemen and horsewomen in California, allowing them to continue to operate in two National Parks for this season and next, giving the National Park Service the authority to reissue permits while it works through updating its permitting process.

2. Without this legislation, backcountry and wilderness access in these parks for Americans from across our nation including youth and people with disabilities will be halted. This affects not just commercial pack stations but service groups that employ the use of pack stock to support their programs.
3. The Washington State delegation from the House of Representatives has already agreed to HR 4849 by unanimous consent. So has the rest of the House. Congressman Hastings, Chair of the House Natural Resources Committee quickly acted on moving forward this legislation in less than 24 hours. This was made possible by a commitment by House Democrats to join House Republicans in supporting the legislation as long as it was specific to the urgent issue at hand. It is.
4. Please act quickly and move HR 4849 out of the Senate with the same bipartisan unity. Our nation has always supported access to the backcountry and wilderness by hoof or foot. Even with modern pressures by newly developed forms of outdoor recreation, we must continue to value our western heritage by passing on appreciation of America's Great Outdoors to future generations of Americans and to any current American regardless of age and/or physical ability. It is the men and women who work with horses and mules that are key to this success.

To email Senator Cantwell, use

<http://cantwell.senate.gov/contact/>

To email Senator Murray, use

<http://murray.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?p=ContactMe>

I think this is enough information for this month, so I'm going to stop here.