

HOUSE BILL ANALYSIS

SB 5307

Title: An act relating to the reclamation of surface disturbances caused by underground mining.

Brief Description: Concerning reclamation of underground mine tailings.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen, Swecker, Fraser and Kline; by request of Commissioner of Public Lands.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Meeting Date: March 24, 1999.

Bill Analysis Prepared by: Bill Lynch, Counsel (786-7092)

Background: The Department of Natural Resources regulates surface mining through the surface mining reclamation laws. Most of the mines in the state are open pit sand and gravel operations, although some metal mines are regulated by the Department of Natural Resources on a site-specific basis. The basic objective of surface mine reclamation is to re-establish on a continuing basis the vegetative cover, slope stability, water conditions, and safety conditions suitable to the proposed subsequent use consistent with local land use plans for the surface mine site.

The Department of Ecology regulates the reclamation of underground metal mines. Because there are so few underground metal mines, the Department of Ecology uses the expertise of the Department of Natural Resources when preparing reclamation plans for the surface activities of these underground mines.

Summary of Bill: The definitions of disturbed area and reclamation in the surface mining law are expanded to include aboveground waste rock sites and tailing facilities, and other surface manifestations of underground mines. The effect of changing these definitions in the surface mining law is to bring these activities under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources rather than the Department of Ecology.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

