

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6506

AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 1994

Brief Description: Creating a water resources board that is in charge of policies for water code enforcement and regulation.

SPONSORS: Senators M. Rasmussen, Newhouse, Haugen, Loveland, Morton and Winsley

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Staff: Phil Moeller (786-7445)

Hearing Dates: February 1, 1994

BACKGROUND:

The beneficial use of water is essential to the state's economy. Beneficial uses of water include domestic water supplies, irrigation, fish, shellfish, game, recreation, industrial supplies, generation of hydroelectric power, navigation, and potentially other uses.

Existing water resources are under increased pressure due to population growth and the value of water. Currently a wide array of public and private entities guide existing policy and are planning for future allocation of water resources. Some entities have suggested the benefit of establishing a new policy board to guide the future competing interests of water resource policy.

SUMMARY:

A five-member Water Resources Board is created with powers and duties that include the management, conservation, utilization, planning development and adjudication of the state's waters. The board is directed to appoint an administrator of water resources to implement the decisions of the board. The water resource program is declared to remain within the Department of Ecology.

Board members are chosen by the Governor from distinct geographical areas of the state and except for initial appointments, appointments are for five-year terms.

The board is given the following specific powers: to implement water resource statutes through rules; to develop a comprehensive state water resource program including instream flows; to develop proposals for statutory changes for submission to the Legislature; to establish and implement programs and procedures for decisions on water right applications; to establish a mediation process for water right

disputes; and to develop policies on enforcement and regulation of water rights.

References to the Department of Ecology in several water administration chapters of the Revised Code of Washington are changed to "Water Resources Board."

As of July 1, 1994, any appropriations made to the Department of Ecology for functions transferred to the board shall continue to be used as designated by the board. Rules and business pending before the Department of Ecology related to functions transferred to the board become the responsibility of the board.

The Ecological Commission is repealed.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: requested January 27, 1994

Effective Date: July 1, 1994