

VETO MESSAGE ON SB 5527-S

March 31, 1998

To the Honorable President and Members,  
The Senate of the State of Washington  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am returning herewith, without my approval, Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5527 entitled:

"AN ACT Relating to incentives for water-efficient irrigation systems;"

ESSB 5527 would allow water right holders who conserve water through the use of efficient irrigation techniques to apply that water to new parcels of land, or sell or lease it to others, including the state.

A water right has specific parameters limiting the amount of water, the land on which, and purpose for which it may be used. Those parameters protect the public's interest by ensuring that only the necessary amount of water is used, leaving excess water available for other important uses, after the needs of the water rights holder have been met.

We do not have enough water available in Washington to meet all of our needs. The state has a compelling interest in assuring that water is allocated fairly among different uses, such as increasing in-stream flows for fish. This is an especially important issue today when many streams are over-allocated and have inadequate flows for fish that have been, or may soon be, listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. If we do not take steps to protect fish, the federal government will do it for us, including federal limitations on our water use.

During the interim I will ask the Joint Natural Resource Cabinet to develop a proposal for the next legislative session that will provide an equitable way to allocate conserved water between off-stream and in-stream uses, and that provides incentive for irrigators to conserve. Water allocation issues should also be resolved collaboratively through watershed planning efforts.

For these reasons, I have vetoed Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5527 in its entirety.

Respectfully submitted,  
Gary Locke  
Governor