

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 2166

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Water, Energy & Environment, March 30, 2005

Title: An act relating to the joint legislative committee on water supply during drought.

Brief Description: Creating the joint legislative committee on water supply during drought.

Sponsors: Representatives Newhouse, Linville, Kristiansen, Hankins, Grant, Holmquist and Haler.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/08/05, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Water, Energy & Environment: 3/30/05 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Poulsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hewitt, Honeyford, Mulliken, Pridemore and Regala.

Staff: Margaret King (786-7416)

Background: Below-normal precipitation and above-normal temperatures have resulted in widespread below-normal snowpack in the state. Precipitation and snow-pack levels put this year among the five driest winters ever recorded. The latest Seasonal Drought Outlook for April through June, released March 17, 2005, from National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), indicates drought is likely to continue across the Northwest and Northern Rockies into June, with only some temporary improvement for parts of the region. A noted shift in the weather pattern during the last half of March will bring a more favorable storm track toward the region, especially from the Cascades to the coast, however, NOAA predicts that it is unlikely that significant drought improvement can develop for most of the region this late in the wet season, given the near-record low mountain snowpacks.

The March stream-flow forecasts predict that most of the watersheds in Washington will have between 22 and 50 percent of normal water supplies, assuming normal precipitation for the remainder of the year. The prediction falls well below the 75 percent threshold for declaring a drought emergency. On March 10, 2005, Governor Christine Gregoire authorized the Department of Ecology (DOE) to declare a drought emergency and DOE immediately signed a declaration for a statewide drought emergency.

Summary of Bill: A joint legislative committee on water supply during drought is created. The committee consists of four Senators and four Representatives selected biennially. The Senators, two from each of the two largest political parties, will be appointed by the President of the Senate (President). The Representatives, two from each of the two largest political parties, will be appointed by the Speaker of the House (Speaker). The chair of the committee responsible for water resource issues must be included as one of the four Senators and one of

the four Representatives. A chair and vice chair must be elected by the committee with a member of the House of Representatives being the chair in even-numbered years, and a member of the Senate being chair in odd-numbered years. Vacancies will be filled by the presiding officer of the appropriate legislative chamber by appointment from the same political party as the departing member. Members serve until their successors are appointed or until they no longer are members of the legislature, whichever occurs first.

The committee has the authority to request and review information relating to water supply conditions in the state and economic, environmental, and other impacts relating to decreased water supply and make recommendation to the Senate and the House of Representatives on budgetary and legislative action which will improve the state's drought response programs and planning.

When a drought conditions order is in effect the chair must convene the committee and the DOE must provide to the committee a monthly report describing drought response activities of the DOE and other state and federal agencies participating on the water supply availability committee. The report must include information regarding applications for, and approvals and denials of, emergency water withdrawals and temporary changes or transfers of water rights.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

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

Testimony For: The committee will help address issues of drought funding and allocation. The committee should also consider long term solutions, such as storage and water usage, to reduce severity of future droughts.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Representative Newhouse, prime sponsor; Craig Engelking, Sierra Club.