

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5203

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Water, Energy & Environment, February 8, 2005

Title: An act relating to a water policy pilot project in the Methow river basin.

Brief Description: Authorizing a pilot water policy project in the Methow river basin.

Sponsors: Senators Parlette, Morton, Mulliken, Honeyford, Stevens, Deccio, Swecker, Roach, Delvin and Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Water, Energy & Environment: 2/3/05, 2/8/05 [DP-WM].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

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

Staff: Margaret King (786-7416)

Background: In the 1990's the water level in Barnsley and Twin Lakes began to decline and is currently near historically low levels. Citizens that reside in the area are interested in restoring the water level in the lakes by obtaining water elsewhere in the Methow river basin to recharge the Barnsley and Big Twin Lakes and aquifer.

Summary of Bill: Provides for a pilot project to determine the best approach to meet the needs of people and the environment in the Methow river basin by temporarily placing water into Barnsley and Big Twin Lakes and the aquifer in continuity with the lakes.

The pilot project requires the Department of Ecology (department) to locate sources of water that can be used on a temporary permit bases to restore Barnsley and Twin Lakes water levels to a maintained elevation of 1,794 to 1,796 feet and to measure and study the resulting hydrological effects of the recharge within the Methow river basin and the Twin Lakes basin.

The Department is to provide to the appropriate legislative committees reports summarizing the progress of the pilot project prior to December 1, 2005 and December 1, 2006 and a report summarizing the hydrological findings before June 30, 2007. All temporary water rights permits issued for the pilot project will terminate June 30, 2007, or upon the Department's issuance of denial of a permanent water right for the project, whichever occurs first.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: The pilot project is necessary to increase instream flows of Methow River and Thompson Creek during the late season and to restore and maintain riparian and lowland habitat for aquatic species and mammals of the area. The project would maintain or enhance water quality for trout fishery and recreation. It is a perfect example of an ideal situation for a pilot project.

Testimony Against: None.

Other: The area is in a long term dry cycle. Some are unsure of the benefits of the program on trout fishery and if there would be any benefits on salmonid recovery at this time.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Parlette, prime sponsor; Dick Ewing, Twin Lakes Aquifer Coalition; Ben Johnson, Twin Lakes Aquifer Coalition; John Stuhlmiller, WA Farm Bureau. OTHER: Joe Stohr, DOE; Heather Bartlett, WDRW.