

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6348

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to the interwatershed transfer of water rights.

Brief Description: Protecting rural communities from the harmful impacts of interwatershed water rights transfers.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Water, Energy & Telecommunications (originally sponsored by Senator Morton).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/20/08, 2/21/08 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill
(As Amended by House Committee)

- Requires the Department of Ecology to submit a report and policy recommendations to the Legislature on the impacts of interwatershed transfers.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Van De Wege, Vice Chair; Kretz, Ranking Minority Member; Warnick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Eickmeyer, Grant, Kristiansen, Lantz, Loomis, McCoy, Nelson, Newhouse and Orcutt.

Staff: Jaclyn Ford (786-7339).

Background:

State law permits water rights or portions of water rights to be transferred to other uses or places if the transfer can be made without detriment or injury to existing rights. If the transfer involves surface water supplied by an irrigation district and the transferred water remains in the district, it needs to be approved only by the irrigation district. Other transfers must be approved by the Department of Ecology (DOE).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The DOE will assess the impacts of interwatershed transfers on rural communities, and explore existing and potential new water sources, including snowpack, that may be utilized in order to protect the economic and social welfare of rural communities.

To complete the report, the DOE will work with legislators, stakeholders, and tribes, as well as the local governments from the following water resource inventory areas: 43, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, and 62.

The DOE will submit the report and policy recommendations to the Legislature by November 1, 2008.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill:

The bill clarifies direction to the DOE by restating that the DOE is required to assess the impacts of interwatershed transfers on rural communities and explore existing and potential new water sources, including snowpack, that may be utilized in order to protect the economic and social welfare of rural communities.

Appropriation: None.**Fiscal Note:** Available.**Effective Date of Amended Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after legislation is passed.**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) If water transfers continue, several counties may lose some economic viability. This issue should be studied so that the problem can be solved.

(Neutral) This is a complicated issue. Similar language is found in the Columbia River water delivery bill, and the DOE would like to be consistent in the directions they are given.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Morton, prime sponsor; and Jack Field, Washington Cattlemen's Association.

(Neutral) Evan Sheffels, Washington Department of Ecology.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.