

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6593

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Water, Energy & Telecommunications, February 06, 2008

Title: An act relating to groundwater monitoring and assessment.

Brief Description: Providing for groundwater monitoring and assessments.

Sponsors: Senators Kline, Oemig, Rockefeller, Swecker, Murray, Regala and Pridemore.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Water, Energy & Telecommunications: 1/25/08, 2/06/08 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6593 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rockefeller, Chair; Murray, Vice Chair; Fraser, Morton, Oemig, Pridemore and Regala.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Honeyford, Ranking Minority Member; Delvin and Holmquist.

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is directed to ensure that the waters of the state are utilized for the best interests of the people, to develop and implement a comprehensive state water resources program that will provide a process for making decisions on future water resource allocation and use. Subject to existing rights, all natural groundwaters of the state are public ground waters, belong to the public, and are subject to appropriation for beneficial use.

Additionally, Ecology must make complete inventories of the state's water resources, including both surface and groundwater. Additionally, Ecology may enter into agreements with the Director of the US Geological Survey to ensure that investigations and surveys are carried on in an economical manner.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee was not considered.

SUMMARY OF BILL (Recommended Substitute): Ecology must prepare, by June 30, 2009, a data gap analysis that includes:

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.

- summarizing historic and current monitoring of groundwater levels and water quality within each water resource inventory areas (WRIA);
- evaluating the completeness and quality of the data and conclusions produced from such monitoring;
- identifying priorities for enhanced groundwater monitoring where water levels and water quality are of concern;
- evaluating and recommending quality controls and other protocols associated with data collection;
- summarizing and compiling existing studies of groundwater levels, water quality, and monitoring activities; and
- Recommending components necessary to establish a comprehensive, statewide groundwater monitoring and assessment program and the funding necessary to implement the program.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY WATER, ENERGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute As Passed Committee): Eliminates the requirement that the Department of Ecology conduct two pilot ground water assessments in water resource inventory areas. Eliminates the requirement that the Department of Ecology enhance its groundwater assessment activities to characterize long-term trends in the state's groundwater levels and water quality.

Appropriation: \$2,500,000.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 18, 2008.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony As Heard in Committee: PRO: Over 60 percent of Washington's population currently relies on groundwater for its drinking supply. Since 2000 about 7,000 new wells have been drilled each year in Washington. The state has no consistent program to monitor groundwater. This bill is the first step towards an ambient groundwater monitoring program. This bill will establish a centralized database, provide analysis of work going on in water resources inventory areas, and establish two voluntary programs. To manage our water resources, it is necessary to collect information and understand trends so that decisions to allocate water can be done so equitably. In order to have the best information to make decisions about water use in a basin, long-term groundwater level data at multiple key locations in each basin is critical. Establishing a groundwater monitoring program will provide long-term groundwater data needed to manage water resources. This bill will help local governments establish a framework under which to collect data. Gathering data allows the state to get in front of issues such as climate change in managing water resources.

CON: This bill appears to be duplicative. Ecology is already doing groundwater monitoring in various areas of the state. Additionally, some water resource inventory areas (WRIAs) are also doing groundwater monitoring. Finally, the US Geological Survey has also done groundwater monitoring in the state. Since water resource inventory areas are doing groundwater monitoring, it would make sense for WRIAs to be more involved in this program.

OTHER: Ecology cannot support this bill as it is not in the Governor's budget. Ecology has been assessing groundwater in some regions. This bill establishes good steps for gathering information, allows Ecology to gather existing data, look at everything it has, consider what the WRIAs are doing, and determine where the gaps are before moving forward in establishing a groundwater monitoring program.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kline, prime sponsor; Sun Gunn, Center for Environmental Law and Policy; Sandy Williamson, U.S. Geological Survey; Dave Monthie, King County; Patricia Samption, Friends of the Green River; Mo McBroom, Washington Environmental Council; John Stuhlmiller, Washington Farm Bureau.

CON: Glen Smith, Washington State Groundwater Association; David McClure, Klickitat County.

OTHER: Rob Duff, Washington Department of Ecology.