

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SHB 1138

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As of March 16, 2023

**Title:** An act relating to drought preparedness.

**Brief Description:** Concerning drought preparedness.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Chapman, Dent, Ramel, Leavitt, Doglio, Lekanoff, Donaghy and Ormsby; by request of Department of Ecology).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/28/23, 96-1.

**Committee Activity:** Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 3/16/23.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides that projects funded by grants issued to address drought conditions no longer need to be completed while a drought emergency order is in effect.
- Changes the name of the Drought Preparedness and Response Account to the Drought Preparedness Account.
- Establishes the Emergency Drought Response Account.
- Allows the Chair of the Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought to convene the committee when a drought advisory is in effect.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

**Staff:** Karen Epps (786-7424)

**Background:** Drought Emergency Orders. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is

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authorized to declare drought emergencies by administrative order. Before it may declare a drought emergency, Ecology must determine an area is experiencing or is expected to experience less than 75 percent of normal water supply and is expected to suffer undue hardships as a result of the dry conditions. Prior to issuing an order, Ecology must first consult with federal and state agencies and must receive approval from the Governor. Legislation passed in 2020 authorized Ecology to issue a drought advisory when it appears drought conditions may develop, based on statutory definitions of normal water supply and drought conditions.

Ecology may, upon issuing a drought emergency order, authorize emergency withdrawals of public surface and ground waters, as long as the withdrawals are put to beneficial uses and will not reduce flows below the essential minimum for fisheries and other state and federal interests. Issuing a drought order also allows Ecology to approve temporary changes in the use of a water right, employ additional people, acquire emergency equipment, and revise any drought contingency plans.

The drought emergency order also allows Ecology to make loans or grants from emergency water supply funds when necessary to help alleviate drought conditions. Under the grant program, eligible public entities may apply for grants for projects such as creation of additional water storage, development of emergency water supplies, and projects designed to mitigate for the impacts of water supply shortages on fish and wildlife.

Projects must show substantial benefit from securing water supply, availability, or reliability relative to project costs. Any project funded by grant funding must be completed while the drought emergency order is in effect. These expenditures are made from the State Emergency Water Projects Revolving Account. Ecology also manages the State Drought Preparedness and Response Account (Preparedness and Response Account). Funds in the Preparedness and Response Account may be used by Ecology for drought preparedness.

Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought. The Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought (Drought Committee) is comprised of eight legislative members and must include the chairs of the water resources committees of each legislative chamber. The Drought Committee may convene from time to time at the call of the chair when a drought emergency order is in effect or when the chair determines, in consultation with Ecology, it is likely such an order will be issued within the next year. When a drought conditions order is in effect, Ecology must provide the Drought Committee with at least monthly reports describing drought response activities of Ecology and other state and federal agencies. The Drought Committee is authorized to make recommendations to the Legislature on budgetary and legislative actions to improve the state's drought response programs and planning.

**Summary of Bill:** Projects funded by grants issued by Ecology to address drought conditions no longer need to be completed while a drought emergency order is in effect.

The Drought Preparedness and Response Account is renamed the Drought Preparedness Account. Expenditures from the Drought Preparedness Account may be used for drought planning and preparedness activities.

The Emergency Drought Response Account (account) is created in the state treasury. Funds in the account may be spent only after appropriation. Expenditures from the account may be used only to provide relief for the immediate hardship caused by water unavailability while a drought emergency order is in effect.

The circumstances in which the Drought Committee is authorized to convene are amended to also include when a drought advisory is in effect. The information that Ecology is required to provide the committee while a drought emergency order is in effect must include information regarding drought grants that have been applied for or issued.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The bill in its current form makes incremental improvements that are important for our state's drought response. The bill creates a separate account for drought emergencies and will provide a funding structure so that Ecology can request funding through decision packages. It is important to invest in drought planning and preparation, as well as emergency response, to reduce long term damages and costs and make the state more resilient to climate change impacts. Washington is projected to experience less snowpack and hotter, dryer summers, so drought and its impacts on rivers and streams, and the fish that rely on them, will be more common. Drought emergencies can happen quickly and without advanced warning. While this bill does not contain funding, the bill is a good first step because the state will see more rapidly occurring and longer lasting droughts.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Dave Christensen, Washington Department of Ecology; James Kraft, Washington Water Trust.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.