

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5555

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As of February 13, 2011

**Title:** An act relating to interbasin transfers of water rights.

**Brief Description:** Concerning interbasin transfers of water rights.

**Sponsors:** Senators Parlette, Hatfield, Morton, Honeyford and Hewitt.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Environment, Water & Energy: 2/09/11.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, WATER & ENERGY

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

**Background:** Washington operates under a water right permit system. The right to use water that has been put to beneficial use is, and remains, an appurtenance of the land or place where the water is used. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) may permit certain changes to a water right. Ecology may also permit a transfer of a water right from one holder to another. In processing change or transfer applications, Ecology analyzes the validity, limits, and quantity of the right. If it appears that the transfer of the water right, change of point of diversion, or purpose of use can be made without harming existing rights, Ecology must grant the transfer or change.

**Summary of Bill:** Ecology may only approve a change or transfer application for an interbasin water rights transfer after conferring with the board of county commissioners in the county in which a water right is being transferred from regarding the effect the transfer will have on the county. Interbasin water rights transfer means a transfer of a water right for which the proposed point of diversion is in a different basin than the proposed place of beneficial use.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on February 5, 2011.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

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

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*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.*

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: This bill is addressing an issue that is referred to as water south. Many water right transfers occur out of the watershed or out of the county. Many people believe that water rights are a property right, so there shouldn't be any interference by anyone if they choose to sell their water. This bill provides that Ecology notify the county commissioners when a water right transfer is going to occur. This bill does not give the county any power over that issue. The concern is that if water is transferred out of the county, it will impact their economic ability to survive as a county. Often water transfers happen without the knowledge of the county commissioners. It may make sense to consider mitigation for the counties.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Parlette, prime sponsor; Andrew Lampe, Okanogan County Commissioner; Steve Robinson, Center for Environmental Law and Policy.