

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8011

As Passed Senate, May 25, 2011

Brief Description: Regarding runoff from dams on the Snake and Columbia rivers and the impact on the state's fish resources.

Sponsors: Senators Swecker, Morton, Ranker, Haugen, Rockefeller, Pridemore and White.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

First Special Session: Passed Senate: 5/25/11, 45-0.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: According to federal agency publications, the Columbia and Snake Rivers are expected to see high runoff levels between May and the end of June of 2011. This is due to above normal precipitation, below average temperatures, and the resulting high snowpack level.

In mid-May of 2011, the federal government began increasing river flows through the Columbia and Snake river dams. The agencies took this step in order to reduce the risk of flood damage by maintaining space in upstream reservoirs to capture the expected runoff later in the spring.

High spill levels through dams can result in elevated dissolved gas levels in the waters below. In turn, high levels of total dissolved gas can injure and kill fish by causing gas bubble disease. As of late-May of 2011, the federal government reported high dissolved gas levels associated with many federal dams along the Columbia and Lower Snake Rivers. Particularly high total dissolved gas levels have been noted at Rufus Woods Lake near Grand Coulee Dam, which contains resident fish and a private commercial fish growing operations.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature requests that the federal government consider, develop, and implement appropriate spring runoff management alternatives that both:

- provide the necessary reservoir capacity to capture expected runoff; and
- avoid, minimize, and, if necessary, mitigate for impacts to the state's fish resources and private commercial fish growing operations.

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.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.