

Chapter 70A.100 RCW
PUBLIC WATER SYSTEM COORDINATION ACT OF 1977

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RCW 70A.100.010 Legislative declaration. The legislature hereby finds that an adequate supply of potable water for domestic, commercial, and industrial use is vital to the health and well-being of the people of the state. Readily available water for use in public water systems is limited and should be developed and used efficiently with a minimum of loss or waste.

In order to maximize efficient and effective development of the state's public water supply systems, the department of health shall assist water purveyors by providing a procedure to coordinate the planning of the public water supply systems. [1991 c 3 § 365; 1977 ex.s. c 142 § 1. Formerly RCW 70.116.010.]

RCW 70A.100.020 Declaration of purpose. The purposes of this chapter are:

- (1) To provide for the establishment of critical water supply service areas related to water utility planning and development;
- (2) To provide for the development of minimum planning and design standards for critical water supply service areas to insure that water systems developed in these areas are consistent with regional needs;
- (3) To assist in the orderly and efficient administration of state financial assistance programs for public water systems; and
- (4) To assist public water systems to meet reasonable standards of quality, quantity and pressure. [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 2. Formerly RCW 70.116.020.]

RCW 70A.100.030 Definitions. Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the following terms when used in this chapter shall be defined as follows:

(1) "Coordinated water system plan" means a plan for public water systems within a critical water supply service area which identifies the present and future needs of the systems and sets forth means for meeting those needs in the most efficient manner possible. Such a plan shall include provisions for subsequently updating the plan. In areas where more than one water system exists, a coordinated plan may consist of either: (a) A new plan developed for the area following its designation as a critical water supply service area; or (b) a compilation of compatible water system plans existing at the time of such designation and containing such supplementary provisions as are necessary to satisfy the requirements of this chapter. Any such coordinated plan must include provisions regarding: Future service area designations; assessment of the feasibility of shared source, transmission, and storage facilities; emergency inter-ties; design standards; and other concerns related to the construction and operation of the water system facilities.

(2) "Critical water supply service area" means a geographical area which is characterized by a proliferation of small, inadequate water systems, or by water supply problems which threaten the present or future water quality or reliability of service in such a manner that efficient and orderly development may best be achieved through coordinated planning by the water utilities in the area.

(3) "Public water system" means any system providing water intended for, or used for, human consumption or other domestic uses. It includes, but is not limited to, the source, treatment for purifying purposes only, storage, transmission, pumping, and distribution facilities where water is furnished to any community, or number of individuals, or is made available to the public for human consumption or domestic use, but excluding water systems serving one single-family residence. However, systems existing on September 21, 1977 which are owner operated and serve less than ten single-family residences or which serve only one industrial plant shall be excluded from this definition and the provisions of this chapter.

(4) "Purveyor" means any agency or subdivision of the state or any municipal corporation, firm, company, mutual or cooperative association, institution, partnership, or person or any other entity, that owns or operates for wholesale or retail service a public water system. It also means the authorized agents of any such entities.

(5) "Secretary" means the secretary of the department of health or the secretary's authorized representative.

(6) "Service area" means a specific geographical area serviced or for which service is planned by a purveyor. [1991 c 3 § 366; 1977 ex.s. c 142 § 3. Formerly RCW 70.116.030.]

RCW 70A.100.040 Critical water supply service area—Designation—Establishment or amendment of external boundaries—Procedures. (1)

The secretary and the appropriate local planning agencies and purveyors, shall study geographical areas where water supply problems related to uncoordinated planning, inadequate water quality or unreliable service appear to exist. If the results of the study indicate that such water supply problems do exist, the secretary or the county legislative authority shall designate the area involved as

being a critical water supply service area, consult with the appropriate local planning agencies and purveyors, and appoint a committee of not less than three representatives therefrom solely for the purpose of establishing the proposed external boundaries of the critical water supply service area. The committee shall include a representative from each purveyor serving more than fifty customers, the county legislative authority, county planning agency, and health agencies. Such proposed boundaries shall be established within six months of the appointment of the committee.

During the six month period following the establishment of the proposed external boundaries of the critical water supply services areas, the county legislative authority shall conduct public hearings on the proposed boundaries and shall modify or ratify the proposed boundaries in accordance with the findings of the public hearings. The boundaries shall reflect the existing land usage, and permitted densities in county plans, ordinances, and/or growth policies. If the proposed boundaries are not modified during the six month period, the proposed boundaries shall be automatically ratified and be the critical water supply service area.

After establishment of the external boundaries of the critical water supply service area, no new public water systems may be approved within the boundary area unless an existing water purveyor is unable to provide water service.

(2) At the time a critical water supply service area is established, the external boundaries for such area shall not include any fractional part of a purveyor's existing contiguous service area.

(3) The external boundaries of the critical water supply service area may be amended in accordance with procedures prescribed in subsection (1) of this section for the establishment of the critical water supply service areas when such amendment is necessary to accomplish the purposes of this chapter. [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 4. Formerly RCW 70.116.040.]

RCW 70A.100.050 Development of water system plans for critical water supply service areas. (1) Each purveyor within the boundaries of a critical water supply service area shall develop a water system plan for the purveyor's future service area if such a plan has not already been developed: PROVIDED, That nonmunicipally owned public water systems are exempt from the planning requirements of this chapter, except for the establishment of service area boundaries if they have no plans for water service beyond their existing service area: PROVIDED FURTHER, That if the county legislative authority permits a change in development that will increase the demand for water service of such a system beyond the existing system's ability to provide minimum water service, the purveyor shall develop a water system plan in accordance with this section. The establishment of future service area boundaries shall be in accordance with RCW 70A.100.070.

(2) After the boundaries of a critical water supply service area have been established pursuant to RCW 70A.100.040, the committee established in RCW 70A.100.040 shall participate in the development of a coordinated water system plan for the designated area. Such a plan shall incorporate all water system plans developed pursuant to subsection (1) of this section. The plan shall provide for maximum integration and coordination of public water system facilities consistent with the protection and enhancement of the public health

and well-being. Decisions of the committee shall be by majority vote of those present at meetings of the committee.

(3) Those portions of a critical water supply service area not yet served by a public water system shall have a coordinated water system plan developed by existing purveyors based upon permitted densities in county plans, ordinances, and/or growth policies for a minimum of five years beyond the date of establishment of the boundaries of the critical water supply service area.

(4) To insure that the plan incorporates the proper designs to protect public health, the secretary shall adopt regulations pursuant to chapter 34.05 RCW concerning the scope and content of coordinated water system plans, and shall ensure, as minimum requirements, that such plans:

(a) Are reviewed by the appropriate local governmental agency to insure that the plan is not inconsistent with the land use plans, shoreline master programs, and/or developmental policies of the general purpose local government or governments whose jurisdiction the water system plan affects.

(b) Recognize all water resource plans, water quality plans, and water pollution control plans which have been adopted by units of local, regional, and state government.

(c) Incorporate the fire protection standards developed pursuant to RCW 70A.100.080.

(d) Identify the future service area boundaries of the public water system or systems included in the plan within the critical water supply service area.

(e) Identify feasible emergency inter-ties between adjacent purveyors.

(f) Include satellite system management requirements consistent with RCW 70A.100.130.

(g) Include policies and procedures that generally address failing water systems for which counties may become responsible under RCW 43.70.195.

(5) If a "water general plan" for a critical water supply service area or portion thereof has been prepared pursuant to chapter 36.94 RCW and such a plan meets the requirements of subsections (1) and (4) of this section, such a plan shall constitute the coordinated water system plan for the applicable geographical area.

(6) The committee established in RCW 70A.100.040 may develop and utilize a mechanism for addressing disputes that arise in the development of the coordinated water system plan.

(7) Prior to the submission of a coordinated water system plan to the secretary for approval pursuant to RCW 70A.100.060, the legislative authorities of the counties in which the critical water supply service area is located shall hold a public hearing thereon and shall determine the plan's consistency with subsection (4) of this section. If within sixty days of receipt of the plan, the legislative authorities find any segment of a proposed service area of a purveyor's plan or any segment of the coordinated water system plan to be inconsistent with any current land use plans, shoreline master programs, and/or developmental policies of the general purpose local government or governments whose jurisdiction the water system plan affects, the secretary shall not approve that portion of the plan until the inconsistency is resolved between the local government and the purveyor. If no comments have been received from the legislative authorities within sixty days of receipt of the plan, the secretary may consider the plan for approval.

(8) Any county legislative authority may adopt an abbreviated plan for the provision of water supplies within its boundaries that includes provisions for service area boundaries, minimum design criteria, and review process. The elements of the abbreviated plan shall conform to the criteria established by the department under subsection (4) of this section and shall otherwise be consistent with other adopted land use and resource plans. The county legislative authority may, in lieu of the committee required under RCW 70A.100.040, and the procedures authorized in this section, utilize an advisory committee that is representative of the water utilities and local governments within its jurisdiction to assist in the preparation of the abbreviated plan, which may be adopted by resolution and submitted to the secretary for approval. Purveyors within the boundaries covered by the abbreviated plan need not develop a water system plan, except to the extent required by the secretary or state board of health under other authority. Any abbreviated plan adopted by a county legislative authority pursuant to this subsection shall be subject to the same provisions contained in RCW 70A.100.060 for coordinated water system plans that are approved by the secretary. [2020 c 20 § 1327; 1995 c 376 § 7; 1977 ex.s. c 142 § 5. Formerly RCW 70.116.050.]

Findings—1995 c 376: See note following RCW 70A.100.060.

RCW 70A.100.060 Approval of coordinated water system plan—Limitations following approval—Dispute resolution mechanism—Update or revision of plan. (1) A coordinated water system plan shall be submitted to the secretary for design approval within two years of the establishment of the boundaries of a critical water supply service area.

(2) The secretary shall review the coordinated water system plan and, to the extent the plan is consistent with the requirements of this chapter and regulations adopted hereunder, shall approve the plan, provided that the secretary shall not approve those portions of a coordinated water system plan that fail to meet the requirements for future service area boundaries until any boundary dispute is resolved as set forth in RCW 70A.100.070.

(3) Following the approval of a coordinated water system plan by the secretary:

(a) All purveyors constructing or proposing to construct public water system facilities within the area covered by the plan shall comply with the plan.

(b) No other purveyor shall establish a public water system within the area covered by the plan, unless the local legislative authority determines that existing purveyors are unable to provide the service in a timely and reasonable manner, pursuant to guidelines developed by the secretary. An existing purveyor is unable to provide the service in a timely manner if the water cannot be provided to an applicant for water within one hundred twenty days unless specified otherwise by the local legislative authority. If such a determination is made, the local legislative authority shall require the new public water system to be constructed in accordance with the construction standards and specifications embodied in the coordinated water system plan approved for the area. The service area boundaries in the

coordinated plan for the affected utilities shall be revised to reflect the decision of the local legislative authority.

(4) The secretary may deny proposals to establish or to expand any public water system within a critical water supply service area for which there is not an approved coordinated water system plan at any time after two years of the establishment of the critical water supply service area: PROVIDED, That service connections shall not be considered expansions.

(5) The affected legislative authorities may develop and utilize a mechanism for addressing disputes that arise in the implementation of the coordinated water system plan after the plan has been approved by the secretary.

(6) After adoption of the initial coordinated water system plan, the local legislative authority or the secretary may determine that the plan should be updated or revised. The legislative authority may initiate an update at any time, but the secretary may initiate an update no more frequently than once every five years. The update may encompass all or a portion of the plan, with the scope of the update to be determined by the secretary and the legislative authority. The process for the update shall be the one prescribed in RCW 70A.100.050.

(7) The provisions of subsection (3) of this section shall not apply in any county for which a coordinated water system plan has not been approved under subsection (2) of this section.

(8) If the secretary initiates an update or revision of a coordinated water system plan, the state shall pay for the cost of updating or revising the plan. [2020 c 20 § 1328; 1995 c 376 § 2; 1977 ex.s. c 142 § 6. Formerly RCW 70.116.060.]

Findings—1995 c 376: "The legislature finds that:

(1) Protection of the state's water resources, and utilization of such resources for provision of public water supplies, requires more efficient and effective management than is currently provided under state law;

(2) The provision of public water supplies to the people of the state should be undertaken in a manner that is consistent with the planning principles of the growth management act and the comprehensive plans adopted by local governments under the growth management act;

(3) Small water systems have inherent difficulties with proper planning, operation, financing, management and maintenance. The ability of such systems to provide safe and reliable supplies to their customers on a long-term basis needs to be assured through proper management and training of operators;

(4) New water quality standards and operational requirements for public water systems will soon generate higher rates for the customers of those systems, which may be difficult for customers to afford to pay. It is in the best interest of the people of this state that small systems maintain themselves in a financially viable condition;

(5) The drinking water 2000 task force has recommended maintaining a strong and properly funded statewide drinking water program, retaining primary responsibility for administering the federal safe drinking water act in Washington. The task force has further recommended delegation of as many water system regulatory functions as possible to local governments, with provision of adequate resources and elimination of barriers to such delegation. In order to achieve these objectives, the state shall provide adequate funding

from both general state funds and funding directly from the regulated water system;

(6) The public health services improvement plan recommends that the principal public health functions in Washington, including regulation of public water systems, should be fully funded by state revenues and undertaken by local jurisdictions with the capacity to perform them; and

(7) State government, local governments, water suppliers, and other interested parties should work for continuing economic growth of the state by maximizing the use of existing water supply management alternatives, including regional water systems, satellite management, and coordinated water system development." [1995 c 376 § 1.]

RCW 70A.100.070 Service area boundaries within critical water supply area. (1) The proposed service area boundaries of public water systems within the critical water supply service area that are required to submit water system plans under this chapter shall be identified in the system's plan. The local legislative authority, or its planning department or other designee, shall review the proposed boundaries to determine whether the proposed boundaries of one or more systems overlap. The boundaries determined by the local legislative authority not to overlap shall be incorporated into the coordinated water system plan. Where any overlap exists, the local legislative authority may attempt to resolve the conflict through procedures established under RCW 70A.100.060(5).

(2) Any final decision by a local legislative authority regarding overlapping service areas, or any unresolved disputes regarding service area boundaries, may be appealed or referred to the secretary in writing for resolution. After receipt of an appeal or referral, the secretary shall hold a public hearing thereon. The secretary shall provide notice of the hearing by certified mail to each purveyor involved in the dispute, to each county legislative authority having jurisdiction in the area and to the public. The secretary shall provide public notice pursuant to the provisions of chapter 65.16 RCW. Such notice shall be given at least twenty days prior to the hearing. The hearing may be continued from time to time and, at the termination thereof, the secretary may restrict the expansion of service of any purveyor within the area if the secretary finds such restriction is necessary to provide the greatest protection of the public health and well-being. [2020 c 20 § 1329; 1995 c 376 § 13; 1977 ex.s. c 142 § 7. Formerly RCW 70.116.070.]

Findings—1995 c 376: See note following RCW 70A.100.060.

RCW 70A.100.080 Performance standards relating to fire protection. The secretary shall adopt performance standards relating to fire protection to be incorporated into the design and construction of public water systems. The standards shall be consistent with recognized national standards. The secretary shall adopt regulations pertaining to the application and enforcement of the standards: PROVIDED, That the regulations shall require the application of the standards for new and expanding systems only. The standards shall apply in critical water supply service areas unless the approved

coordinated plan provides for nonfire flow systems. [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 8. Formerly RCW 70.116.080.]

RCW 70A.100.090 Assumption of jurisdiction or control of public water system by city, town, or code city. The assumption of jurisdiction or control of any public water system or systems by a city, town, or code city, shall be subject to the provisions of chapter 35.13A RCW, and the provisions of this chapter shall be superseded by the provisions of chapter 35.13A RCW regarding such an assumption of jurisdiction. [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 9. Formerly RCW 70.116.090.]

RCW 70A.100.100 Bottled water exempt. Nothing in this chapter shall apply to water which is bottled or otherwise packaged in a container for human consumption or domestic use, or to the treatment, storage and transportation facilities used in the processing of the bottled water or the distribution of the bottles or containers of water. [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 10. Formerly RCW 70.116.100.]

RCW 70A.100.110 Rate making authority preserved. Nothing in this chapter shall be construed to alter in any way the existing authority of purveyors and municipal corporations to establish, administer and apply water rates and rate provisions. [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 11. Formerly RCW 70.116.110.]

RCW 70A.100.120 Short title. This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Public Water System Coordination Act of 1977". [1977 ex.s. c 142 § 12. Formerly RCW 70.116.120.]

RCW 70A.100.130 Satellite system management agencies—
Definitions. (1) The secretary shall adopt rules pursuant to chapter 34.05 RCW establishing criteria for designating individuals or water purveyors as qualified satellite system management agencies. The criteria shall set forth minimum standards for designation as a satellite system management agency qualified to assume ownership, operation, or both, of an existing or proposed public water system. The criteria shall include demonstration of financial integrity and operational capability, and may require demonstration of previous experience in successful operation and management of a public water system.

(2) Each county shall identify potential satellite system management agencies to the secretary for areas where: (a) No purveyor has been designated a future service area pursuant to this chapter, or (b) an existing purveyor is unable or unwilling to provide service. Preference shall be given to public utilities or utility districts or to investor-owned utilities under the jurisdiction of the utilities and transportation commission.

(3) The secretary shall approve satellite system management agencies meeting the established criteria and shall maintain and make available to counties a list of approved agencies. Prior to the construction of a new public water system, the individual(s) proposing

the new system or requesting service shall first be directed by the local agency responsible for issuing the construction or building permit to one or more qualified satellite system management agencies designated for the service area where the new system is proposed for the purpose of exploring the possibility of a satellite agency either owning or operating the proposed new water system.

(4) Approved satellite system management agencies shall be reviewed periodically by the secretary for continued compliance with established criteria. The secretary may require status reports and other information necessary for such review. Satellite system management agencies shall be subject to reapproval at the discretion of the secretary but not less than once every five years.

(5) The secretary may assess reasonable fees to process applications for initial approval and for periodic review of satellite system management agencies.

(6) For purposes of this section, "satellite system management agency" and "satellite agency" shall mean a person or entity that is certified by the secretary to own or operate more than one public water system on a regional or countywide basis, without the necessity for a physical connection between such systems. [2013 c 251 § 8; 1991 c 18 § 1. Formerly RCW 70.116.134.]

Residual balance of funds—Effective date—2013 c 251: See notes following RCW 41.06.280.

RCW 70A.100.140 Review of water or sewer system plan—Time limitations—Notice of rejection of plan or extension of timeline. For any new or revised water or sewer system plan submitted for review under this chapter, the department of health shall review and either approve, conditionally approve, reject, or request amendments within ninety days of the receipt of the submission of the plan. The department of health may extend this ninety-day time limitation for new submittals by up to an additional ninety days if insufficient time exists to adequately review the general comprehensive plan. For rejections of plans or extensions of the timeline, the department shall provide in writing, to the person or entity submitting the plan, the reason for such action. In addition, the person or entity submitting the plan and the department of health may mutually agree to an extension of the deadlines contained in this section. [2002 c 161 § 3. Formerly RCW 70.116.140.]