

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5894

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Water, Energy & Environment, March 1, 2005

Title: An act relating to the joint legislative committee on water supply during drought.

Brief Description: Creating the joint legislative committee on water supply during drought.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Morton, Poulsen, Pridemore, Mulliken, Hewitt, Honeyford, Rockefeller, Oke, Kline, Parlette, Kohl-Welles and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Water, Energy & Environment: 2/23/05, 3/1/05 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Poulsen, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hewitt, Honeyford, Mulliken, Pridemore and Regala.

Staff: Margaret King (786-7416)

Background: Below-normal precipitation and above-normal temperatures during the last three months have resulted in widespread below-normal snowpack in the state, with many mountain locations reporting record low snow water content. An analysis by the U.S. Department of Agriculture showed that, at Stampede Pass in North Central Washington, late January snowpack was down to 18 percent of average and water-year-to-date precipitation was down to 61 percent of average. The latest from the Climate Prediction Center predicts that the Washington portion of the Northwest will likely be warmer than usual in February. Precipitation is likely to be low in Washington, Oregon, and the Idaho panhandle, with even higher chances of dry conditions in Western Washington. Due to these conditions and a long term forecast, the state could experience drought conditions in 2005.

Summary of Bill: A joint legislative committee on water supply during drought is created. The committee consists of four Senators and four Representatives selected biennially. The Senators, two from each of the two largest political parties, will be appointed by the President of the Senate (President). The Representatives, two from each of the two largest political parties, will be appointed by the Speaker of the House (Speaker). The chair of the committee responsible for water resource issues must be included as one of the four Senators and one of the four Representatives. A chair and vice chair must be elected by the committee with a member of the House of Representatives being the chair in even-numbered years and a member of the Senate being chair in odd-numbered years. Vacancies will be filled by the presiding officer of the appropriate legislative chamber by appointment from the same political party as the departing member. Members serve until their successors are appointed or until they no longer are members of the Legislature, whichever occurs first.

The committee has the authority to request and review information relating to water supply conditions in the state, and economic, environmental and other impacts relating to decreased water supply and make recommendation to the Senate and the House of Representatives on budgetary and legislative action what will improve the state's drought response programs and planning.

When a drought conditions order is in effect the chair must convene the committee and the Department of Ecology (DOE) must provide to the committee a monthly report describing drought response activities of the DOE and other state and federal agencies participating on the water supply availability committee. The report must include information regarding applications for, and approvals and denials of, emergency water withdrawals and temporary changes or transfers of water rights.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: This bill provides a well organized way to exchange information and work with the Legislature on drought issues and relief. It will help to identify those in the Legislature addressing drought issues. Time is of the essence in a drought, perennial crops such as fruit trees need quick action for survival and legislative oversight will give the DOE more flexibility. The committee will develop expertise to address longer term strategies for drought issues. The bill should also include consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to address impacts to fish.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Fraser, prime sponsor; Ken Slattery, DOE; Jim Halstrom, WA State Horticultural Assn; Mike Schwisow, WA State Water Resources Assn; Kathleen Collins, WA Water Policy Alliance; John Stuhlmiller, WA Farm Bureau; Dawn Vyvyan, Yakima Nation and Puyallup Tribe.