

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6086

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Water, Energy & Environment, March 30, 2005

Title: An act relating to allowing retrofitting of domestic wells to maintain agricultural irrigation purposes during drought.

Brief Description: Concerning the retrofitting of wells during drought conditions.

Sponsors: Senators Honeyford, Hewitt, Poulsen, Morton, Mulliken and Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Water, Energy & Environment: 3/30/05 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6086 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill 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: On March 10, 2005, Governor Christine Gregoire authorized the Department of Ecology (DOE) to declare a drought emergency and DOE immediately signed a declaration for a statewide drought emergency.

The March stream-flow forecasts predict that most of the watersheds in Washington will have between 22 and 50 percent of normal water supplies, assuming normal precipitation for the remainder of the year. The latest Seasonal Drought Outlook for April through June, released March 17, 2005 from NOAA, indicates drought is likely to continue across the Northwest and northern Rockies into June, with only some temporary improvement for parts of the region.

The Emergency Water Withdrawal and Facilities provision of the state code provides that when a drought conditions order is in effect the DOE is empowered to authorize emergency withdrawal of public surface and ground waters subject to certain conditions and restrictions.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Specifically includes the retrofitting of domestic wells to maintain agricultural irrigation purposes as a physical works alteration that may be approved by DOE pursuant to the drought declaration provisions of the code.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill was not considered.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: There are only two well diggers that can dig emergency wells, and with the numerous applications and requirements on such wells it is not a viable option for many. Options other than new drought wells should be available for DOE to consider. While DOE believes that it currently has the ability to consider such proposals, it is supportive of the bill and clarifying its authority.

Testimony Against: None.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Honeyford, prime sponsor; Kim Mikkelsen, orchard owner; Ken Slattery, DOE.