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**Rural Development, Agriculture, &  
Natural Resources Committee**

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**HB 2765**

**Brief Description:** Creating a joint select committee on water.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Lekanoff, Ortiz-Self, Boehnke, Chapman and Slatter.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Creates a joint select legislative committee on water resource policy.

**Hearing Date:** 1/31/20

**Staff:** Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

**Background:**

The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is the state agency with primary authority for administering Washington's laws regarding water rights and water availability. A person seeking a new water right must file an application with Ecology, which must then consider a four-part test when deciding whether to issue the requested right. Ecology also has the authority to adopt rules establishing a minimum water flow for streams, lakes, or other public water bodies for the purposes of protecting fish, game, birds, and the recreational and aesthetic values of the waterways.

**Summary of Bill:**

A joint select committee on water resource policy is established for the purpose of developing a statewide water action plan that identifies areas of statute, administrative rule, policy, and practice that should be updated, and that makes appropriate corresponding strategic policy recommendations, in order to ensure that water resources are appropriately allocated to address current and future statewide needs.

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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.*

The joint select committee consists of two members from each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate, and two members from each of the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. There are two co-chairs of the committee, one of whom must be from the majority caucus of one chamber of the Legislature, and the other of whom must be from the minority caucus of the other chamber of the Legislature. The joint select committee must, by a majority of the members, adopt rules to govern its conduct as may be necessary or appropriate.

The joint select committee must hold at least three meetings each calendar year, one of which is encouraged to be at a location outside of Olympia. In even-numbered years, at least one meeting, which must take place no later than September 30, must include a review of recent progress in the area of water policy and a consideration of water-related policy or budgetary matters to come before the Legislature during the upcoming legislative session. Each meeting of the joint select committee must include an opportunity for public comment.

The joint select committee has the following responsibilities:

- to conduct a comprehensive review of water policy, including statutes, case law, administrative rules, policies, and the laws and policies of other states, where appropriate;
- to engage stakeholders in the joint select committee's deliberations through outreach conducted by the Department and reports from the Department to the joint select committee;
- to produce and periodically update a statewide water action plan that identifies areas of statute, administrative rule, policy, and practice that should be updated in order to ensure that water resources are appropriately allocated to meet current and future statewide needs; and
- as part of the statewide water action plan, to make recommendations to the legislature on budgetary and policy actions related to water resource policy.

Policy and budgetary recommendations of the joint select committee must be made by a sixty percent majority of the appointed members of the joint select committee. Minority recommendations that achieve the support of at least three of the appointed members of the joint select committee may also be submitted to the Legislature. If a member has not been designated for a position on the committee, that position may not be counted for purposes of determining a quorum.

Within existing appropriations, the expenses of the operations of the joint select committee, including the expenses associated with the joint select committee's meetings, must be paid jointly and in equal amounts by the Senate and the House of Representatives. Joint select committee expenditures are subject to approval by the House Executive Rules Committee and the Senate Facility and Operations Committee. Legislative members of the joint select committee are reimbursed for travel expenses in accordance with RCW 44.04.120.

Staff support for the joint select committee must be provided by the Office of Program Research and Senate Committee Services.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Not requested.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.