
**Agriculture & Natural Resources
Committee**

SB 6125

Brief Description: Extending the expiration date of the department of ecology's authority to enter into voluntary regional agreements.

Sponsors: Senator Honeyford.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends the expiration date for the Department of Ecology's authority to enter into voluntary regional agreements for the purposes of providing new water for out-of-stream uses in the Columbia River basin, from June 30, 2018 to June 30, 2024.

Hearing Date: 2/20/18

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

Voluntary Regional Agreements.

Pursuant to the 2006 Columbia River Basin Water Supply Act, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) is authorized to enter into voluntary regional agreements for the purpose of providing new water for out-of-stream uses, among other purposes. Voluntary regional agreements must ensure that there is no negative impact on seasonal flows of the Columbia and Snake rivers. Voluntary regional agreements must also be harmonized with watershed plans adopted pursuant to the Watershed Planning Act.

Water supplies that are developed and secured through projects funded from the Columbia River Basin accounts must be used in specified ways. Two-thirds of this water must be dedicated to out-of-stream uses, while one-third must be used by Ecology to enhance instream flows. The one-third/two-thirds allocation of water resources between instream and out-of-stream uses does not apply to applications for changes or transfers of existing water rights in the Basin.

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.

Ecology must follow specific notification and consultation procedures prior to entering into a voluntary regional agreement. This process includes a consultation with county legislative authorities, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, affected tribal governments, and the federal government.

The Columbia River mainstem is defined to mean all water in the Columbia River within the ordinary high water mark of the main channel of the Columbia River between the U.S.–Canada border and the Bonneville dam, and all groundwater within one mile of the high water mark.

The authority to enter into voluntary regional agreements expires June 30, 2018.

Watershed Planning Act.

State watershed planning laws provide a process for conducting watershed planning through a locally initiated process. If planning is conducted under this process, it must include a component on current and future water availability and use. It may include components regarding instream flows, water quality, and habitat.

Watershed planning may be conducted for a single Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) or it may be conducted for multiple WRIs. For this purpose, the local governments that initiate the process must select or create a planning unit and designate a lead agency to provide staff support for the planning unit. Once a plan is approved by the planning unit, it is submitted to each of the counties with territory in the watershed or watersheds for which planning was conducted. If approved by the counties, the plan becomes an approved watershed plan.

Summary of Bill:

The expiration date for the authority to enter into voluntary regional agreements is extended to June 30, 2024.

An errant reference to the statutory definition of the Columbia river mainstem is corrected.

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.