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**SENATE BILL 6149**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2020 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Salomon, Van De Wege, Pedersen, Carlyle, Keiser, Liias, Hunt, McCoy, Das, Kuderer, Lovelett, Nguyen, Stanford, and Wilson, C.

AN ACT Relating to ensuring compliance with the federal clean water act by prohibiting certain discharges into waters of the state; amending RCW 77.55.021; reenacting and amending RCW 77.55.011; adding a new section to chapter 90.48 RCW; creating a new section; and prescribing penalties.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that under RCW 90.48.260, the department of ecology is directed to implement and comply with the federal clean water act. The legislature further finds that Washington state, unlike other states and the environmental protection agency, has taken no action to regulate or limit water quality impacts from motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining. The legislature also finds that federal courts have determined that discharges from this activity require regulation under the clean water act and that Washington's attorney general has supported such regulations in other states as necessary to protect water quality and fish species, even though such protections do not exist in Washington state. The legislature further finds that harmful water quality impacts are occurring in areas designated as critical habitat for threatened or endangered steelhead, salmon, and bull trout, including spawning areas for chinook salmon relied on by southern resident orcas.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 90.48 RCW to read as follows:

(1) A discharge to waters of the state from a motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining operation is subject to the department's authority under this chapter and the federal clean water act. The department shall evaluate whether the number of dischargers subject to this section warrants the adoption of a general permit for motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining. If so, the department is directed to minimize the cost to permit applicants by basing general permit provisions on existing general permits adopted in other states to comply with the federal clean water act.

(2) The following act or acts are prohibited: Motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining or discharge of effluent from such activity to any waters of the state that has been designated under the endangered species act as critical habitat, or would impact critical habitat for salmon, steelhead, or bull trout. This includes all fresh waters with designated uses of: Salmonid spawning, rearing, and migration.

(3) A person commits the offense of unlawful motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining if the person engages in such an activity in violation of this chapter or the federal clean water act. Such an offense is subject to enforcement under this chapter.

(4) For the purposes of this section, "motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining" means mining using any form of motorized equipment, including but not limited to a motorized suction dredge, or a gravity siphon suction dredge, for the purpose of extracting gold, silver, or other precious metals, that involves a discharge within the ordinary high water mark of waters of the state.

(5) This section does not apply to:

(a) Aquatic mining using nonmotorized methods, such as gold panning, if the nonmotorized method does not involve use of a gravity siphon suction dredge;

(b) Mining operations where no part of the operation or discharge of effluent from the operation is to waters of the state;

(c) Surface mining operations regulated by the department of natural resources under Title 78 RCW;

(d) Metals mining and milling operations as defined in chapter 78.56 RCW; or

(e) Activities related to an industrial facility, dredging related to navigability, or activities subject to a clean water act section 404 individual permit.

**Sec.**  RCW 77.55.011 and 2012 1st sp.s. c 1 s 101 are each reenacted and amended to read as follows:

The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Bed" means the land below the ordinary high water lines of state waters. This definition does not include irrigation ditches, canals, stormwater runoff devices, or other artificial watercourses except where they exist in a natural watercourse that has been altered artificially.

(2) "Board" means the pollution control hearings board created in chapter 43.21B RCW.

(3) "Commission" means the state fish and wildlife commission.

(4) "Date of receipt" has the same meaning as defined in RCW 43.21B.001.

(5) "Department" means the department of fish and wildlife.

(6) "Director" means the director of the department of fish and wildlife.

(7) "Emergency" means an immediate threat to life, the public, property, or of environmental degradation.

(8) "Emergency permit" means a verbal hydraulic project approval or the written follow‑up to the verbal approval issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021(12).

(9) "Expedited permit" means a hydraulic project approval issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021 (14) and (16).

(10) "Forest practices hydraulic project" means a hydraulic project that requires a forest practices application or notification under chapter 76.09 RCW.

(11) "Hydraulic project" means the construction or performance of work that will use, divert, obstruct, or change the natural flow or bed of any of the salt or fresh waters of the state.

(12) "Imminent danger" means a threat by weather, water flow, or other natural conditions that is likely to occur within sixty days of a request for a permit application.

(13) "Marina" means a public or private facility providing boat moorage space, fuel, or commercial services. Commercial services include but are not limited to overnight or live-aboard boating accommodations.

(14) "Marine terminal" means a public or private commercial wharf located in the navigable water of the state and used, or intended to be used, as a port or facility for the storing, handling, transferring, or transporting of goods to and from vessels.

(15) "Multiple site permit" means a hydraulic project approval issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021 for hydraulic projects occurring at more than one specific location and which includes site‑specific requirements.

(16) "Ordinary high water line" means the mark on the shores of all water that will be found by examining the bed and banks and ascertaining where the presence and action of waters are so common and usual, and so long continued in ordinary years as to mark upon the soil or vegetation a character distinct from the abutting upland. Provided, that in any area where the ordinary high water line cannot be found, the ordinary high water line adjoining saltwater is the line of mean higher high water and the ordinary high water line adjoining fresh water is the elevation of the mean annual flood.

(17) "Pamphlet hydraulic project" means a hydraulic project for the removal or control of aquatic noxious weeds conducted under the aquatic plants and fish pamphlet authorized by RCW 77.55.081, or for mineral prospecting and mining conducted under the gold and fish pamphlet authorized by RCW 77.55.091.

(18) "Permit" means a hydraulic project approval permit issued under this chapter.

(19) "Permit modification" means a hydraulic project approval issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021 that extends, renews, or changes the conditions of a previously issued hydraulic project approval.

(20) "Sandbars" includes, but is not limited to, sand, gravel, rock, silt, and sediments.

(21) "Small scale prospecting and mining" means the use of only the following methods: Pans; nonmotorized sluice boxes; nonmotorized concentrators; and minirocker boxes for the discovery and recovery of minerals, but does not include metals mining and milling operations as defined in RCW 78.56.020.

(22) "Spartina," "purple loosestrife," and "aquatic noxious weeds" have the same meanings as defined in RCW 17.26.020.

(23) "Stream bank stabilization" means those projects that prevent or limit erosion, slippage, and mass wasting. These projects include, but are not limited to, bank resloping, log and debris relocation or removal, planting of woody vegetation, bank protection using rock or woody material or placement of jetties or groins, gravel removal, or erosion control.

(24) "Tide gate" means a one-way check valve that prevents the backflow of tidal water.

(25) "Waters of the state" and "state waters" means all salt and fresh waters waterward of the ordinary high water line and within the territorial boundary of the state.

(26) "Motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining" means mining using any form of motorized equipment including, but not limited to, a motorized suction dredge or a gravity siphon suction dredge, for the purpose of extracting gold, silver, or other precious metals, that involves a discharge to waters of the state, but does not include metals mining and milling operations as defined in RCW 78.56.020.

**Sec.**  RCW 77.55.021 and 2012 1st sp.s. c 1 s 102 are each amended to read as follows:

(1) Except as provided in RCW 77.55.031, 77.55.051, 77.55.041, and 77.55.361, in the event that any person or government agency desires to undertake a hydraulic project, the person or government agency shall, before commencing work thereon, secure the approval of the department in the form of a permit as to the adequacy of the means proposed for the protection of fish life.

(2) A complete written application for a permit may be submitted in person or by registered mail and must contain the following:

(a) General plans for the overall project;

(b) Complete plans and specifications of the proposed construction or work within the mean higher high water line in salt water or within the ordinary high water line in fresh water;

(c) Complete plans and specifications for the proper protection of fish life;

(d) Notice of compliance with any applicable requirements of the state environmental policy act, unless otherwise provided for in this chapter; and

(e) ((~~Payment of all applicable application fees charged by the department under RCW 77.55.321~~)) In the event that any person or government agency desires to undertake mineral prospecting or mining using motorized or gravity siphon equipment or desires to discharge effluent from such an activity to waters of the state, the person or government agency must also provide proof of compliance with the requirements of the federal clean water act issued by the department of ecology.

(3) The department may establish direct billing accounts or other funds transfer methods with permit applicants to satisfy the fee payment requirements of RCW 77.55.321.

(4) The department may accept complete, written applications as provided in this section for multiple site permits and may issue these permits. For multiple site permits, each specific location must be identified.

(5) With the exception of emergency permits as provided in subsection (12) of this section, applications for permits must be submitted to the department's headquarters office in Olympia. Requests for emergency permits as provided in subsection (12) of this section may be made to the permitting biologist assigned to the location in which the emergency occurs, to the department's regional office in which the emergency occurs, or to the department's headquarters office.

(6) Except as provided for emergency permits in subsection (12) of this section, the department may not proceed with permit review until all fees are paid in full as required in RCW 77.55.321.

(7)(a) Protection of fish life is the only ground upon which approval of a permit may be denied or conditioned. Approval of a permit may not be unreasonably withheld or unreasonably conditioned.

(b) Except as provided in this subsection and subsections (12) through (14) and (16) of this section, the department has forty-five calendar days upon receipt of a complete application to grant or deny approval of a permit. The forty-five day requirement is suspended if:

(i) After ten working days of receipt of the application, the applicant remains unavailable or unable to arrange for a timely field evaluation of the proposed project;

(ii) The site is physically inaccessible for inspection;

(iii) The applicant requests a delay; or

(iv) The department is issuing a permit for a stormwater discharge and is complying with the requirements of RCW 77.55.161(3)(b).

(c) Immediately upon determination that the forty-five day period is suspended under (b) of this subsection, the department shall notify the applicant in writing of the reasons for the delay.

(d) The period of forty-five calendar days may be extended if the permit is part of a multiagency permit streamlining effort and all participating permitting agencies and the permit applicant agree to an extended timeline longer than forty-five calendar days.

(8) If the department denies approval of a permit, the department shall provide the applicant a written statement of the specific reasons why and how the proposed project would adversely affect fish life.

(a) Except as provided in (b) of this subsection, issuance, denial, conditioning, or modification of a permit shall be appealable to the board within thirty days from the date of receipt of the decision as provided in RCW 43.21B.230.

(b) Issuance, denial, conditioning, or modification of a permit may be informally appealed to the department within thirty days from the date of receipt of the decision. Requests for informal appeals must be filed in the form and manner prescribed by the department by rule. A permit decision that has been informally appealed to the department is appealable to the board within thirty days from the date of receipt of the department's decision on the informal appeal.

(9)(a) The permittee must demonstrate substantial progress on construction of that portion of the project relating to the permit within two years of the date of issuance.

(b) Approval of a permit is valid for up to five years from the date of issuance, except as provided in (c) of this subsection and in RCW 77.55.151.

(c) A permit remains in effect without need for periodic renewal for hydraulic projects that divert water for agricultural irrigation or stock watering purposes and that involve seasonal construction or other work. A permit for stream bank stabilization projects to protect farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020 remains in effect without need for periodic renewal if the problem causing the need for the stream bank stabilization occurs on an annual or more frequent basis. The permittee must notify the appropriate agency before commencing the construction or other work within the area covered by the permit.

(10) The department may, after consultation with the permittee, modify a permit due to changed conditions. A modification under this subsection is not subject to the fees provided under RCW 77.55.321. The modification is appealable as provided in subsection (8) of this section. For a hydraulic project that diverts water for agricultural irrigation or stock watering purposes, when the hydraulic project or other work is associated with stream bank stabilization to protect farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020, the burden is on the department to show that changed conditions warrant the modification in order to protect fish life.

(11) A permittee may request modification of a permit due to changed conditions. The request must be processed within forty-five calendar days of receipt of the written request and payment of applicable fees under RCW 77.55.321. A decision by the department is appealable as provided in subsection (8) of this section. For a hydraulic project that diverts water for agricultural irrigation or stock watering purposes, when the hydraulic project or other work is associated with stream bank stabilization to protect farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020, the burden is on the permittee to show that changed conditions warrant the requested modification and that such a modification will not impair fish life.

(12)(a) The department, the county legislative authority, or the governor may declare and continue an emergency. If the county legislative authority declares an emergency under this subsection, it shall immediately notify the department. A declared state of emergency by the governor under RCW 43.06.010 shall constitute a declaration under this subsection.

(b) The department, through its authorized representatives, shall issue immediately, upon request, verbal approval for a stream crossing, or work to remove any obstructions, repair existing structures, restore stream banks, protect fish life, or protect property threatened by the stream or a change in the streamflow without the necessity of obtaining a written permit prior to commencing work. Conditions of the emergency verbal permit must be reduced to writing within thirty days and complied with as provided for in this chapter.

(c) The department may not require the provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW, to be met as a condition of issuing a permit under this subsection.

(d) The department may not charge a person requesting an emergency permit any of the fees authorized by RCW 77.55.321 until after the emergency permit is issued and reduced to writing.

(13) All state and local agencies with authority under this chapter to issue permits or other authorizations in connection with emergency water withdrawals and facilities authorized under RCW 43.83B.410 shall expedite the processing of such permits or authorizations in keeping with the emergency nature of such requests and shall provide a decision to the applicant within fifteen calendar days of the date of application.

(14) The department or the county legislative authority may determine an imminent danger exists. The county legislative authority shall notify the department, in writing, if it determines that an imminent danger exists. In cases of imminent danger, the department shall issue an expedited written permit, upon request, for work to remove any obstructions, repair existing structures, restore banks, protect fish resources, or protect property. Expedited permit requests require a complete written application as provided in subsection (2) of this section and must be issued within fifteen calendar days of the receipt of a complete written application. Approval of an expedited permit is valid for up to sixty days from the date of issuance. The department may not require the provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW, to be met as a condition of issuing a permit under this subsection.

(15)(a) For any property, except for property located on a marine shoreline, that has experienced at least two consecutive years of flooding or erosion that has damaged or has threatened to damage a major structure, water supply system, septic system, or access to any road or highway, the county legislative authority may determine that a chronic danger exists. The county legislative authority shall notify the department, in writing, when it determines that a chronic danger exists. In cases of chronic danger, the department shall issue a permit, upon request, for work necessary to abate the chronic danger by removing any obstructions, repairing existing structures, restoring banks, restoring road or highway access, protecting fish resources, or protecting property. Permit requests must be made and processed in accordance with subsections (2) and (7) of this section.

(b) Any projects proposed to address a chronic danger identified under (a) of this subsection that satisfies the project description identified in RCW 77.55.181(1)(a)(ii) are not subject to the provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW. However, the project is subject to the review process established in RCW 77.55.181(3) as if it were a fish habitat improvement project.

(16) The department may issue an expedited written permit in those instances where normal permit processing would result in significant hardship for the applicant or unacceptable damage to the environment. Expedited permit requests require a complete written application as provided in subsection (2) of this section and must be issued within fifteen calendar days of the receipt of a complete written application. Approval of an expedited permit is valid for up to sixty days from the date of issuance. The department may not require the provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW, to be met as a condition of issuing a permit under this subsection.

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