

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5746

As of February 15, 2022

Title: An act relating to drought preparedness, response, and funding.

Brief Description: Concerning drought preparedness, response, and funding.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick, Nobles and Stanford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 1/13/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Changes the name of the State Drought Preparedness and Response Account to the State Drought Preparedness Account and requires the State Treasurer to transfer \$2,000,000 from the general fund into the account at the beginning of each biennium.
- Establishes the Emergency Drought Response Account and requires the State Treasurer, upon the issuance of a drought emergency order, to transfer from the general fund to the account an amount necessary to bring the balance to \$3,000,000.
- Requires the Department of Ecology to meet certain reporting requirements.
- Allows the Chair of the Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought to convene the committee when a drought advisory is in effect.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background: Drought Emergency Orders. The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is authorized to declare drought emergencies by administrative order. Before it may declare a drought emergency, Ecology must determine an area is experiencing or is expected to experience less than 75 percent of normal water supply and is expected to suffer undue hardships as a result of the dry conditions. Prior to issuing an order, Ecology must first consult with federal and state agencies and must receive approval from the Governor. Legislation passed in 2020 authorized Ecology to issue a drought advisory when it appears drought conditions may develop, based on statutory definitions of normal water supply and drought conditions.

Ecology may, upon issuing a drought emergency order, authorize emergency withdrawals of public surface and ground waters, as long as the withdrawals are put to beneficial uses and will not reduce flows below the essential minimum for fisheries and other state and federal interests. Issuing a drought order also allows Ecology to approve temporary changes in the use of a water right, employ additional people, acquire emergency equipment, and revise any drought contingency plans.

The drought emergency order also allows Ecology to make loans or grants from emergency water supply funds when necessary to help alleviate drought conditions. Under the grant program, eligible public entities may apply for grants for projects such as creation of additional water storage, development of emergency water supplies, and projects designed to mitigate for the impacts of water supply shortages on fish and wildlife. Projects must show substantial benefit from securing water supply, availability, or reliability relative to project costs. Any project funded by grant funding must be completed while the drought emergency order is in effect. These expenditures are made from the State Emergency Water Projects Revolving Account. In addition to that account, Ecology manages the State Drought Preparedness and Response Account (Preparedness and Response Account). Funds in the Preparedness and Response Account may be used by Ecology for drought preparedness.

Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought. The Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought (Drought Committee) is comprised of eight legislative members and must include the chairs of the water resources committees of each legislative chamber. The Drought Committee may convene from time to time at the call of the chair when a drought emergency order is in effect or when the chair determines, in consultation with Ecology, it is likely such an order will be issued within the next year. When a drought conditions order is in effect, Ecology must provide the Drought Committee with at least monthly reports describing drought response activities of Ecology and other state and federal agencies. The Drought Committee is authorized to make recommendations to the Legislature on budgetary and legislative actions to improve the state's drought response programs and planning.

Summary of Bill: The name of the Preparedness and Response Account is changed to the State Drought Preparedness Account (Preparedness Account). At the beginning of each

biennium, the State Treasurer must transfer \$2,000,000 from the general fund into the Preparedness Account. Expenditures may be used for both drought planning and preparedness activities, including grants under the existing grant program. Projects do not need to be completed while a drought emergency order is in effect.

An Emergency Drought Response Account is established to fund emergency drought response actions and grants to public entities to provide relief for the immediate hardship caused by water unavailability while a drought emergency order is in effect. Upon the issuance of a drought emergency order, the State Treasurer must transfer from the general fund to the Emergency Drought Response Account an amount necessary to bring the balance to \$3,000,000. Ecology must provide the Office of Financial Management, Senate Ways and Means Committee and House Appropriations Committee, and the Drought Committee with a close-out summary following the expiration of the drought emergency order.

The chair of the Drought Committee may convene the committee when a drought advisory is in effect. Ecology must include information on grant funding in its monthly reports to the Drought Committee when a drought emergency order is in effect.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.