

## Senate Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee

January 28th, 2025

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### **Bill: SB 80 – Drinking Water Amendments**

Sponsor: Senator Scott D. Sandall

Floor Sponsor: Representative Casey Snider

### **UASD Position: Tracking**

This Bill modifies the Safe Drinking Water Act to include a fee schedule.

Discussion: Senator Sandall, along with Nathan Lunstad the Director of the Division of Drinking Water (“Division”), presented the Bill. The sponsor explained that this Bill was introduced last year and aims to address challenges related to funding for drinking water, particularly for sampling and security testing across the state. Currently, much of the funding comes from the federal government. However, with increasing population growth and rising demands for water testing and monitoring, these federal funds are no longer sufficient. This Bill would allow the Division to implement a fee based on water usage. That fee would be used to create a stable funding source beyond the federal funding. Mr. Lunstad explained that this Bill would enable the Division to apply fees through the fee schedule process, reduce dependence on federal funding, stabilize funding to account for population growth, and incentivize water conservation. He provided statistics highlighting the significant gap between current federal funding levels and the funding required to maintain and expand water systems in the state. The data helped demonstrate the urgency of establishing a new funding mechanism.

Senator Hinkins expressed his support for the Bill, particularly its focus on water conservation. Senator Stratton raised concerns about the potential for unintended consequences, such as encouraging water usage. He suggested that the fee structure might need to be more sophisticated. In response, the sponsor clarified that the fee would be based on gallons consumed rather than percentages to simplify the process. The Executive Director of the Rural Water Association of Utah (“RWAU”) voiced concerns about the fees outlined in the Bill. While supportive of granting fee authority to the Division, they recommended that the specific fee amounts be further debated to ensure they are appropriate for generating the necessary funds. He suggested the Bill focus solely on granting authority to the Division. A few citizens spoke in opposition to the Bill, fearing it would increase their water bills. Senator Stratton reiterated his earlier concern and encouraged the sponsor to clarify the fee structure through an amendment. Senator Blouin expressed his support for the Bill. Senator Sandall indicated he was open to amending the Bill or reviewing the fees further as the Bill moves through the legislative process.

Yeas: 5

Nays: 0

N/V: 2

**Outcome: SB 80 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.**

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### **Bill: SB 131 – Water Commitment Amendments**

Sponsor: Senator Nate Blouin

Floor Sponsor: Undeclared  
**UASD Position: Tracking**

This Bill addresses water commitments by water providers.

Discussion: Senator Blouin explained that the idea for this legislation was brought to him by the Salt Lake City Public Utilities Department, which develops a water conservation plan every few years. The sponsor pointed to line 72 which allows municipalities to include the commitments of available water in their plans. The Bill also applies to sovereign lands across the state, enabling the commitment of available water to uses on sovereign lands. He believes this change would increase public awareness of the efforts being made in various water conservation plans. Scott Martin, an attorney who assisted in drafting the Bill, spoke in support of the legislation.

Senator Hinkins asked whether this Bill could potentially interfere with the Central Water Project on the Green River. Mr. Martin replied that the Project was beyond the scope of the Bill and would not have an impact. The legislation simply adds an optional component to water conservation plans thereby allowing retail water providers or water conservancy districts to identify conserved water being allocated to sovereign lands. Senator Hinkins then asked if the language could be amended to specifically reference the Great Salt Lake instead of “sovereign lands”. Senator Blouin expressed openness to the idea but felt that the current language was appropriate as it intentionally addresses water conservation efforts statewide. Senator Owens questioned whether the Bill was necessary because the outlined process within the Bill can already be done without the additional statutory language. Senator Blouin acknowledged that there was nothing currently in law preventing this process. That said, he argued that the Bill would formally establish it in statute. Senator Owens and Senator Hinkins expressed skepticism about adding something to statute that was already permissible. Senator Stratton echoed Senator Hinkins’ earlier concern about narrowing the language to the Great Salt Lake. Senator Blouin reiterated his willingness to refine the language to specifically target the Great Salt Lake on the floor of the Senate.

Yeas: 6  
Nays: 0  
N/V: 1

**Outcome: SB 131 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.**

**Bill: HCR 1 – Concurrent Resolution Regarding the Grand County Water Conservancy District**

Sponsor: Representative Carl R. Albrecht

Floor Sponsor: Senator David P. Hinkins

**UASD Position: Support**

This Resolution expresses support for the transfer of federal water infrastructure to the Grand County Water Conservancy District.

Discussion: Representative Albrecht explained that this Resolution addresses the uranium mine tailings near the Colorado River in Moab where radiation waste has been buried. According to the sponsor, a six-inch water line from the Green River located in Green River, Utah has been used to assist with the compaction of this radiation waste. This Resolution would allow the Grand County Water Conservancy District (“District”) to repurpose that water line for future water needs in the towns of Crescent Junction and Thompson Springs. The sponsor further explained that this Resolution urges Congress to transfer federally owned water infrastructure used to convey water from the Green River to the Moab Uranium Mill Tailings Remedial Action project site to the District. This transfer is expected to support development in the area.

Senator Hinkins spoke in favor of the Resolution, emphasizing its potential to aid the development of Thompson Springs. Dale Pierson, Executive Director of the Rural Water Association of Utah, expressed support for the Resolution.

Yeas: 4

Nays: 0

N/V: 3

**Outcome: HCR 1 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation and was placed on the consent calendar in the House.**

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