

Senate Revenue and Taxation Committee

2/18/2025

Bill: 1st Substitute HB 285 – Water Infrastructure Modifications

Sponsor: Representative Casey Snider

Floor Sponsor: Senator Scott D. Sandall

UASD Position: Support

This Bill addresses funding and planning for water infrastructure.

Discussion: Representative Snider stated that last year, a Bill was introduced to improve water infrastructure funding in the state. It established a series of benchmarks, with this Bill representing the first. A study from the Division of Water Resources recommended fund consolidation and outlined requirements for entities applying for state grants. The sponsor explained that this Bill repeals the Water Resources Cities Water Loan Fund, directs loan repayments into the Water Infrastructure Fund, and allows transfers between various water funds and accounts. It also updates definitions, requires capital asset management plans and reserve funding in certain cases, and revises the water infrastructure prioritization process, including specific exemptions. HB 285 streamlines the planning process and authorizes various disparate accounts so that they can co-mingle. The 1st Substitute is a technical cleanup, which makes sure that an entity that applies for water has a Capitol Asset Management Plan and sets standards for what that plan needs to include.

Senator McCay raised a question about the change made on line 218, which modifies certain elements of the Bill, and asked if the Bill impacts the Board of Water Resources (“Board”). The sponsor clarified that the Board responsible for authorizing the Fund is not changing. While the Board will have additional responsibilities to approve and manage, its core authority remains unchanged. Senator McCay then inquired about line 272, asking if the Bill eliminates the Water Resources Conservation Fund. The sponsor explained that the Bill combines several funds but does not eliminate any specific funds, including the Conservation and Development Fund. The Director of the Division of Water Resources added that the Bill facilitates coordination through the Water Infrastructure Fund, enabling the provision of funds to other water priorities.

Senator McCay expressed concern about the difficulty of tracking funds when they are combined. In response, the Director assured him that the Bill includes a requirement for the Unified Water Infrastructure Plan and the Water Infrastructure Project list to be approved by the Legislative Water Development Commission, ensuring transparency. The sponsor further emphasized that the Bill addresses the lack of long-term water plans, and that improved coordination would help create a more strategic approach. He likened the proposed process to the planning and coordination efforts used by the Utah Department of Transportation (“UDOT”). No public comments were made. The Committee adopted the 1st Substitute.

Yeas: 4

Nays: 0

N/V: 3

Outcome: 1st Substitute HB 285 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: 2nd Substitute HB 307 – Wildfire Funding Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Casey Snider

Floor Sponsor: Senator Michael K. McKell

UASD Position: Support and Amended

This Bill addresses wildfires.

Discussion: Representative Snider discussed the 2nd substitute, which incorporates the Utah Association of Special Districts (“UASD”) amendments and was adopted by the Committee. Currently, there are two separate funds managing wildfire suppression and aftermath. This Bill consolidates several funds into the Utah Wildfire Fund (“Fund”), streamlining financial resources for wildfire management. It updates references to the funds merged into the new Fund and amends relevant definitions. The Bill also clarifies the delegation of fire management authority, detailing responsibilities. It specifies the deposits into the Fund and how the funds will be utilized. Additionally, the Bill mandates regular reporting on the Fund’s activities and authorizes rulemaking to facilitate its implementation. It also relocates provisions related to community wildfire preparedness plans, with a focus on the wildland-urban interface (“WUI”).

Senator McCay inquired about the reason for keeping the funds separate in the past. The sponsor explained that there wasn’t a specific reason, but programs like “shared stewardship” have contributed to the current structure. The Bill now consolidates all initiatives into one, making it easier to track fund usage. The Director of the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands, the Unified Fire Authority, and the Utah State Fire Chiefs Association voiced support for the 2nd substitute.

Yeas: 5

Nays: 0

N/V: 2

Outcome: 2nd Substitute HB 307 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.
