

House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee

February 26th, 2025

Bill: HB 507 – Legislative Water Development Commission Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Thomas W. Peterson

Floor Sponsor:

UASD Position: Tracking

This Bill addresses membership requirements on the Legislative Water Development Commission.

Discussion: Representative Peterson stated that this Bill enhances flexibility in selecting members for the Legislative Water Development Commission (“Commission”). It reduces the minimum number of Commission members nominated by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House to two legislators from each body and removes partisanship requirements for Commission members.

Representative Chew inquired about the rationale for reducing the number of members from five in the Senate and eight in the House. The sponsor explained that challenges arose in the previous Session when replacing members who were phasing off the Commission, and this Bill aims to address those challenges by providing greater flexibility. Representative Albrecht asked whether the changes applied exclusively to legislative members, to which the sponsor confirmed they do.

Representative Snider introduced House Amendment 1, explaining that it clarifies partisan concerns by requiring that at least one member from both the House and the Senate be from the minority party. The Committee adopted House Amendment 1, and no further discussion followed.

Yeas: 10

Nays: 0

N/V: 4

Outcome: HB 507, as amended, passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: 1st substitute HB 520 – Water Entity Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Casey Snider

Floor Sponsor:

UASD Position: Oppose

This Bill addresses various water entities including their relationship with the Department of Natural Resources.

Discussion: Representative Snider presented the 1st substitute, which was adopted by the Committee. He noted that the primary change in the substitute further clarifies entity consolidation and roles. The sponsor explained that the scope of the Bill aims to clarify roles and responsibilities within the Department of Natural Resources (“DNR”) and consolidate various functions. He emphasized that the Bill primarily makes administrative adjustments.

This Bill outlines various provisions related to the management of Utah Lake and the Great Salt Lake. It defines the powers and duties of the Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands concerning Utah Lake and mandates that the Utah Lake Authority coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources. Additionally, the board of the Utah Lake Authority is required to report on its coordination efforts. The Bill also modifies provisions governing the water trust for the Great Salt Lake by expanding the responsibilities of the Great Salt Lake Trust Council. It requires the state water agent to coordinate with the Department of Natural Resources and removes certain water agencies from the definition of an independent entity. Furthermore, it transfers the Great Salt Lake Commissioner (“Commissioner”) and the Office of the Great Salt Lake Commissioner to the Department of Natural Resources. Lastly, the Bill mandates that the Great Salt Lake Trust Council review specific expenditures of the Commissioner.

Representative Bennion asked why certain entities were being placed under DNR. The sponsor responded that this change ensures better coordination among them. Representative Bennion then expressed concerns that poor leadership in the future could impair the Commissioner’s function. The sponsor acknowledged that the position is inherently political but stated that these changes would not alter the already political nature of DNR.

Representative Kohler asked whether the Bill included any administrative changes within DNR. The sponsor clarified that it does not. Joel Ferry, Director of the Department of Natural Resources, spoke in support of the Bill. Brian Steed, Commissioner of the Great Salt Lake, spoke in support of the Bill. The Great Salt Lake Enhancement Trust also expressed its support. Representative Shallenberger noted the importance of considering ecosystems in the Bill, but the sponsor did not respond to this comment. No further discussion followed.

Yeas: 11

Nays: 0

N/V: 3

Outcome: 1st substitute HB 520 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.