

SB 946 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Environment and Natural Resources

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Meeting Dates: 4/2

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Makes process for transfer of water use applicable to qualifying right to store water. Ratifies and declares valid past changes to water rights for stored water that have been approved and have become final. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Defines "secondary water right" as water right that refers to a reservoir or pond as a source of water, if the supply is stored under a primary water right to store water. Replaces term "water use subject to transfer" with "water right subject to transfer" throughout transfer statutes (ORS Chapter 540). Defines "place of use" as area submerged by water stored in reservoir or pond at maximum fill. Authorizes holder of water right subject to transfer for storing water in a pond or reservoir to apply for a change in place of use or character of use. Directs Water Resources Commission (WRC) to refuse to accept application to change the point of diversion in a water right subject to transfer for storing water in a pond or reservoir. Requires WRC to approve application unless it determines the proposed change results in injury to an existing water right or an enlargement of the water right subject to transfer. Requires application to identify all secondary water rights that refer to water right subject to transfer. Authorizes combined application to change both the water right subject to transfer and the secondary water right. Requires either a joint application with holders of secondary water rights or written consent by holders to cancellation of secondary water rights if holder of water right subject to transfer does not hold all affected secondary water rights. Authorizes WRC to approve a change in place of use provided listed conditions are met. Ratifies and declares valid any change in a water right in a reservoir or pond that was approved and became final prior to effective date of Act. Applies provisions of Act to applications for changes to water rights made before, on, or after the effective date of Act. Declares emergency, effective upon passage.

BACKGROUND:

A water right is connected to the land where it is used. The water right specifies the quantity of water, point of diversion, place of use, type of use, season of use and priority date. A water right may be transferred from one place to another, the point of diversion may be changed and the type of use allowed under the right may be changed by applying to the Water Resources Department (WRD). The transfer will be approved if WRD determines that the change can be made without injury to other water rights or enlargement of the original right. In 2018, the Department of Justice issued a memo concluding that, with some exceptions, state law does not authorize WRD to allow changes to a right to store water.

Senate Bill 946 would make the water right transfer process applicable to rights to store water.