
SUBSTITUTE HOUSE BILL 1261

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2019 Regular Session

By House Environment & Energy (originally sponsored by Representatives Peterson, Fitzgibbon, Stanford, Tarleton, Ortiz-Self, Lekanoff, Doglio, Macri, and Pollet)

1 AN ACT Relating to ensuring compliance with the federal clean
2 water act by prohibiting certain discharges into waters of the state;
3 amending RCW 77.55.021; reenacting and amending RCW 77.55.011; adding
4 a new section to chapter 90.48 RCW; creating a new section; and
5 prescribing penalties.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that under RCW
8 90.48.260, the department of ecology is directed to implement and
9 comply with the federal clean water act. The legislature further
10 finds that Washington state, unlike other states and the
11 environmental protection agency, has taken no action to regulate or
12 limit water quality impacts from motorized or gravity siphon aquatic
13 mining. The legislature also finds that federal courts have
14 determined that discharges from this activity require regulation
15 under the clean water act and that Washington's attorney general has
16 supported such regulations in other states as necessary to protect
17 water quality and fish species, even though such protections do not
18 exist in Washington state. The legislature further finds that harmful
19 water quality impacts are occurring in areas designated as critical
20 habitat for threatened or endangered steelhead, salmon, and bull

1 trout, including spawning areas for chinook salmon relied on by
2 southern resident orcas.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 90.48
4 RCW to read as follows:

5 (1) A discharge to waters of the state from a motorized or
6 gravity siphon aquatic mining operation is subject to the
7 department's authority under this chapter and the federal clean water
8 act.

9 (2) The following act or acts are prohibited: Motorized or
10 gravity siphon aquatic mining or discharge of effluent from such
11 activity to waters of the state that has been designated under the
12 endangered species act as critical habitat, or would impact critical
13 habitat for salmon, steelhead, or bull trout. This includes all fresh
14 waters with designated uses of: Salmonid spawning, rearing, and
15 migration.

16 (3) A person commits the offense of unlawful motorized or gravity
17 siphon aquatic mining if the person engages in such an activity in
18 violation of this chapter or the federal clean water act. Such an
19 offense is subject to enforcement under this chapter.

20 (4) For the purposes of this section, "motorized or gravity
21 siphon aquatic mining" means mining using any form of motorized
22 equipment, including but not limited to a motorized suction dredge,
23 or a gravity siphon suction dredge, for the purpose of extracting
24 gold, silver, or other precious metals, that involves a discharge
25 within the ordinary high water mark of waters of the state.

26 (5) This section does not apply to:

27 (a) Aquatic mining using nonmotorized methods, such as gold
28 panning, if the nonmotorized method does not involve use of a gravity
29 siphon suction dredge;

30 (b) Mining operations where no part of the operation or discharge
31 of effluent from the operation is to waters of the state;

32 (c) Surface mining operations regulated by the department of
33 natural resources under Title 78 RCW;

34 (d) Metals mining and milling operations as defined in chapter
35 78.56 RCW;

36 (e) Activities related to an industrial facility, dredging
37 related to navigability, or activities subject to a clean water act
38 section 404 individual permit; or

1 (f) Dredging operations undertaken by a diking or drainage
2 district pursuant to Title 85 RCW.

3 **Sec. 3.** RCW 77.55.011 and 2012 1st sp.s. c 1 s 101 are each
4 reenacted and amended to read as follows:

5 The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter
6 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

7 (1) "Bed" means the land below the ordinary high water lines of
8 state waters. This definition does not include irrigation ditches,
9 canals, stormwater runoff devices, or other artificial watercourses
10 except where they exist in a natural watercourse that has been
11 altered artificially.

12 (2) "Board" means the pollution control hearings board created in
13 chapter 43.21B RCW.

14 (3) "Commission" means the state fish and wildlife commission.

15 (4) "Date of receipt" has the same meaning as defined in RCW
16 43.21B.001.

17 (5) "Department" means the department of fish and wildlife.

18 (6) "Director" means the director of the department of fish and
19 wildlife.

20 (7) "Emergency" means an immediate threat to life, the public,
21 property, or of environmental degradation.

22 (8) "Emergency permit" means a verbal hydraulic project approval
23 or the written follow-up to the verbal approval issued to a person
24 under RCW 77.55.021(12).

25 (9) "Expedited permit" means a hydraulic project approval issued
26 to a person under RCW 77.55.021 (14) and (16).

27 (10) "Forest practices hydraulic project" means a hydraulic
28 project that requires a forest practices application or notification
29 under chapter 76.09 RCW.

30 (11) "Hydraulic project" means the construction or performance of
31 work that will use, divert, obstruct, or change the natural flow or
32 bed of any of the salt or freshwaters of the state.

33 (12) "Imminent danger" means a threat by weather, water flow, or
34 other natural conditions that is likely to occur within sixty days of
35 a request for a permit application.

36 (13) "Marina" means a public or private facility providing boat
37 moorage space, fuel, or commercial services. Commercial services
38 include but are not limited to overnight or live-aboard boating
39 accommodations.

1 (14) "Marine terminal" means a public or private commercial wharf
2 located in the navigable water of the state and used, or intended to
3 be used, as a port or facility for the storing, handling,
4 transferring, or transporting of goods to and from vessels.

5 (15) "Multiple site permit" means a hydraulic project approval
6 issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021 for hydraulic projects
7 occurring at more than one specific location and which includes
8 site-specific requirements.

9 (16) "Ordinary high water line" means the mark on the shores of
10 all water that will be found by examining the bed and banks and
11 ascertaining where the presence and action of waters are so common
12 and usual, and so long continued in ordinary years as to mark upon
13 the soil or vegetation a character distinct from the abutting upland.
14 Provided, that in any area where the ordinary high water line cannot
15 be found, the ordinary high water line adjoining saltwater is the
16 line of mean higher high water and the ordinary high water line
17 adjoining freshwater is the elevation of the mean annual flood.

18 (17) "Pamphlet hydraulic project" means a hydraulic project for
19 the removal or control of aquatic noxious weeds conducted under the
20 aquatic plants and fish pamphlet authorized by RCW 77.55.081, or for
21 mineral prospecting and mining conducted under the gold and fish
22 pamphlet authorized by RCW 77.55.091.

23 (18) "Permit" means a hydraulic project approval permit issued
24 under this chapter.

25 (19) "Permit modification" means a hydraulic project approval
26 issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021 that extends, renews, or
27 changes the conditions of a previously issued hydraulic project
28 approval.

29 (20) "Sandbars" includes, but is not limited to, sand, gravel,
30 rock, silt, and sediments.

31 (21) "Small scale prospecting and mining" means the use of only
32 the following methods: Pans; nonmotorized sluice boxes; nonmotorized
33 concentrators; and minirocker boxes for the discovery and recovery of
34 minerals.

35 (22) "Spartina," "purple loosestrife," and "aquatic noxious
36 weeds" have the same meanings as defined in RCW 17.26.020.

37 (23) "Stream bank stabilization" means those projects that
38 prevent or limit erosion, slippage, and mass wasting. These projects
39 include, but are not limited to, bank resloping, log and debris
40 relocation or removal, planting of woody vegetation, bank protection

1 using rock or woody material or placement of jetties or groins,
2 gravel removal, or erosion control.

3 (24) "Tide gate" means a one-way check valve that prevents the
4 backflow of tidal water.

5 (25) "Waters of the state" and "state waters" means all salt and
6 freshwaters waterward of the ordinary high water line and within the
7 territorial boundary of the state.

8 (26) "Motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining" means mining
9 using any form of motorized equipment, including but not limited to a
10 motorized suction dredge, or a gravity siphon suction dredge, for the
11 purpose of extracting gold, silver, or other precious metals, that
12 involves a discharge to waters of the state.

13 **Sec. 4.** RCW 77.55.021 and 2012 1st sp.s. c 1 s 102 are each
14 amended to read as follows:

15 (1) Except as provided in RCW 77.55.031, 77.55.051, 77.55.041,
16 and 77.55.361, in the event that any person or government agency
17 desires to undertake a hydraulic project, the person or government
18 agency shall, before commencing work thereon, secure the approval of
19 the department in the form of a permit as to the adequacy of the
20 means proposed for the protection of fish life.

21 (2) A complete written application for a permit may be submitted
22 in person or by registered mail and must contain the following:

23 (a) General plans for the overall project;

24 (b) Complete plans and specifications of the proposed
25 construction or work within the mean higher high water line in
26 saltwater or within the ordinary high water line in freshwater;

27 (c) Complete plans and specifications for the proper protection
28 of fish life;

29 (d) Notice of compliance with any applicable requirements of the
30 state environmental policy act, unless otherwise provided for in this
31 chapter; (~~and~~)

32 (e) Payment of all applicable application fees charged by the
33 department under RCW 77.55.321; and

34 (f) In the event that any person or government agency desires to
35 engage in mineral prospecting or mining using motorized or gravity
36 siphon equipment, or desires to discharge effluent from such an
37 activity to waters of the state, the person or government agency must
38 also provide proof of compliance with the requirements of the federal
39 clean water act as administered by the department of ecology.

1 (3) The department may establish direct billing accounts or other
2 funds transfer methods with permit applicants to satisfy the fee
3 payment requirements of RCW 77.55.321.

4 (4) The department may accept complete, written applications as
5 provided in this section for multiple site permits and may issue
6 these permits. For multiple site permits, each specific location must
7 be identified.

8 (5) With the exception of emergency permits as provided in
9 subsection (12) of this section, applications for permits must be
10 submitted to the department's headquarters office in Olympia.
11 Requests for emergency permits as provided in subsection (12) of this
12 section may be made to the permitting biologist assigned to the
13 location in which the emergency occurs, to the department's regional
14 office in which the emergency occurs, or to the department's
15 headquarters office.

16 (6) Except as provided for emergency permits in subsection (12)
17 of this section, the department may not proceed with permit review
18 until all fees are paid in full as required in RCW 77.55.321.

19 (7)(a) Protection of fish life is the only ground upon which
20 approval of a permit may be denied or conditioned. Approval of a
21 permit may not be unreasonably withheld or unreasonably conditioned.

22 (b) Except as provided in this subsection and subsections (12)
23 through (14) and (16) of this section, the department has forty-five
24 calendar days upon receipt of a complete application to grant or deny
25 approval of a permit. The forty-five day requirement is suspended if:

26 (i) After ten working days of receipt of the application, the
27 applicant remains unavailable or unable to arrange for a timely field
28 evaluation of the proposed project;

29 (ii) The site is physically inaccessible for inspection;

30 (iii) The applicant requests a delay; or

31 (iv) The department is issuing a permit for a stormwater
32 discharge and is complying with the requirements of RCW
33 77.55.161(3)(b).

34 (c) Immediately upon determination that the forty-five day period
35 is suspended under (b) of this subsection, the department shall
36 notify the applicant in writing of the reasons for the delay.

37 (d) The period of forty-five calendar days may be extended if the
38 permit is part of a multiagency permit streamlining effort and all
39 participating permitting agencies and the permit applicant agree to
40 an extended timeline longer than forty-five calendar days.

1 (8) If the department denies approval of a permit, the department
2 shall provide the applicant a written statement of the specific
3 reasons why and how the proposed project would adversely affect fish
4 life.

5 (a) Except as provided in (b) of this subsection, issuance,
6 denial, conditioning, or modification of a permit shall be appealable
7 to the board within thirty days from the date of receipt of the
8 decision as provided in RCW 43.21B.230.

9 (b) Issuance, denial, conditioning, or modification of a permit
10 may be informally appealed to the department within thirty days from
11 the date of receipt of the decision. Requests for informal appeals
12 must be filed in the form and manner prescribed by the department by
13 rule. A permit decision that has been informally appealed to the
14 department is appealable to the board within thirty days from the
15 date of receipt of the department's decision on the informal appeal.

16 (9) (a) The permittee must demonstrate substantial progress on
17 construction of that portion of the project relating to the permit
18 within two years of the date of issuance.

19 (b) Approval of a permit is valid for up to five years from the
20 date of issuance, except as provided in (c) of this subsection and in
21 RCW 77.55.151.

22 (c) A permit remains in effect without need for periodic renewal
23 for hydraulic projects that divert water for agricultural irrigation
24 or stock watering purposes and that involve seasonal construction or
25 other work. A permit for stream bank stabilization projects to
26 protect farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020
27 remains in effect without need for periodic renewal if the problem
28 causing the need for the stream bank stabilization occurs on an
29 annual or more frequent basis. The permittee must notify the
30 appropriate agency before commencing the construction or other work
31 within the area covered by the permit.

32 (10) The department may, after consultation with the permittee,
33 modify a permit due to changed conditions. A modification under this
34 subsection is not subject to the fees provided under RCW 77.55.321.
35 The modification is appealable as provided in subsection (8) of this
36 section. For a hydraulic project that diverts water for agricultural
37 irrigation or stock watering purposes, when the hydraulic project or
38 other work is associated with stream bank stabilization to protect
39 farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020, the burden is

1 on the department to show that changed conditions warrant the
2 modification in order to protect fish life.

3 (11) A permittee may request modification of a permit due to
4 changed conditions. The request must be processed within forty-five
5 calendar days of receipt of the written request and payment of
6 applicable fees under RCW 77.55.321. A decision by the department is
7 appealable as provided in subsection (8) of this section. For a
8 hydraulic project that diverts water for agricultural irrigation or
9 stock watering purposes, when the hydraulic project or other work is
10 associated with stream bank stabilization to protect farm and
11 agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020, the burden is on the
12 permittee to show that changed conditions warrant the requested
13 modification and that such a modification will not impair fish life.

14 (12)(a) The department, the county legislative authority, or the
15 governor may declare and continue an emergency. If the county
16 legislative authority declares an emergency under this subsection, it
17 shall immediately notify the department. A declared state of
18 emergency by the governor under RCW 43.06.010 shall constitute a
19 declaration under this subsection.

20 (b) The department, through its authorized representatives, shall
21 issue immediately, upon request, verbal approval for a stream
22 crossing, or work to remove any obstructions, repair existing
23 structures, restore stream banks, protect fish life, or protect
24 property threatened by the stream or a change in the streamflow
25 without the necessity of obtaining a written permit prior to
26 commencing work. Conditions of the emergency verbal permit must be
27 reduced to writing within thirty days and complied with as provided
28 for in this chapter.

29 (c) The department may not require the provisions of the state
30 environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW, to be met as a
31 condition of issuing a permit under this subsection.

32 (d) The department may not charge a person requesting an
33 emergency permit any of the fees authorized by RCW 77.55.321 until
34 after the emergency permit is issued and reduced to writing.

35 (13) All state and local agencies with authority under this
36 chapter to issue permits or other authorizations in connection with
37 emergency water withdrawals and facilities authorized under RCW
38 43.83B.410 shall expedite the processing of such permits or
39 authorizations in keeping with the emergency nature of such requests

1 and shall provide a decision to the applicant within fifteen calendar
2 days of the date of application.

3 (14) The department or the county legislative authority may
4 determine an imminent danger exists. The county legislative authority
5 shall notify the department, in writing, if it determines that an
6 imminent danger exists. In cases of imminent danger, the department
7 shall issue an expedited written permit, upon request, for work to
8 remove any obstructions, repair existing structures, restore banks,
9 protect fish resources, or protect property. Expedited permit
10 requests require a complete written application as provided in
11 subsection (2) of this section and must be issued within fifteen
12 calendar days of the receipt of a complete written application.
13 Approval of an expedited permit is valid for up to sixty days from
14 the date of issuance. The department may not require the provisions
15 of the state environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW, to be met
16 as a condition of issuing a permit under this subsection.

17 (15)(a) For any property, except for property located on a marine
18 shoreline, that has experienced at least two consecutive years of
19 flooding or erosion that has damaged or has threatened to damage a
20 major structure, water supply system, septic system, or access to any
21 road or highway, the county legislative authority may determine that
22 a chronic danger exists. The county legislative authority shall
23 notify the department, in writing, when it determines that a chronic
24 danger exists. In cases of chronic danger, the department shall issue
25 a permit, upon request, for work necessary to abate the chronic
26 danger by removing any obstructions, repairing existing structures,
27 restoring banks, restoring road or highway access, protecting fish
28 resources, or protecting property. Permit requests must be made and
29 processed in accordance with subsections (2) and (7) of this section.

30 (b) Any projects proposed to address a chronic danger identified
31 under (a) of this subsection that satisfies the project description
32 identified in RCW 77.55.181(1)(a)(ii) are not subject to the
33 provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter 43.21C RCW.
34 However, the project is subject to the review process established in
35 RCW 77.55.181(3) as if it were a fish habitat improvement project.

36 (16) The department may issue an expedited written permit in
37 those instances where normal permit processing would result in
38 significant hardship for the applicant or unacceptable damage to the
39 environment. Expedited permit requests require a complete written
40 application as provided in subsection (2) of this section and must be

1 issued within fifteen calendar days of the receipt of a complete
2 written application. Approval of an expedited permit is valid for up
3 to sixty days from the date of issuance. The department may not
4 require the provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter
5 43.21C RCW, to be met as a condition of issuing a permit under this
6 subsection.

--- END ---