
SENATE BILL 6149

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Senators Salomon, Van De Wege, Pedersen, Carlyle, Keiser, Lias, Hunt, and McCoy

Prefiled 01/08/20.

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. The department shall evaluate whether the number of dischargers
9 subject to this section warrants the adoption of a general permit for
10 motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining. If so, the department is
11 directed to minimize the cost to permit applicants by basing general
12 permit provisions on existing general permits adopted in other states
13 to comply with the federal clean water act.

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

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

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

31 (5) This section does not apply to:

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

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

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

1 (d) Metals mining and milling operations as defined in chapter
2 78.56 RCW; or

3 (e) Activities related to an industrial facility, dredging
4 related to navigability, or activities subject to a clean water act
5 section 404 individual permit.

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

8 The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter
9 unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

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

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

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

18 (4) "Date of receipt" has the same meaning as defined in RCW
19 43.21B.001.

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

21 (6) "Director" means the director of the department of fish and
22 wildlife.

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

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

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

30 (10) "Forest practices hydraulic project" means a hydraulic
31 project that requires a forest practices application or notification
32 under chapter 76.09 RCW.

33 (11) "Hydraulic project" means the construction or performance of
34 work that will use, divert, obstruct, or change the natural flow or
35 bed of any of the salt or fresh waters of the state.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

29 (19) "Permit modification" means a hydraulic project approval
30 issued to a person under RCW 77.55.021 that extends, renews, or
31 changes the conditions of a previously issued hydraulic project
32 approval.

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

35 (21) "Small scale prospecting and mining" means the use of only
36 the following methods: Pans; nonmotorized sluice boxes; nonmotorized
37 concentrators; and minirocker boxes for the discovery and recovery of
38 minerals, but does not include metals mining and milling operations
39 as defined in RCW 78.56.020.

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

3 (23) "Stream bank stabilization" means those projects that
4 prevent or limit erosion, slippage, and mass wasting. These projects
5 include, but are not limited to, bank resloping, log and debris
6 relocation or removal, planting of woody vegetation, bank protection
7 using rock or woody material or placement of jetties or groins,
8 gravel removal, or erosion control.

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

11 (25) "Waters of the state" and "state waters" means all salt and
12 fresh waters waterward of the ordinary high water line and within the
13 territorial boundary of the state.

14 (26) "Motorized or gravity siphon aquatic mining" means mining
15 using any form of motorized equipment including, but not limited to,
16 a motorized suction dredge or a gravity siphon suction dredge, for
17 the purpose of extracting gold, silver, or other precious metals,
18 that involves a discharge to waters of the state, but does not
19 include metals mining and milling operations as defined in RCW
20 78.56.020.

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

23 (1) Except as provided in RCW 77.55.031, 77.55.051, 77.55.041,
24 and 77.55.361, in the event that any person or government agency
25 desires to undertake a hydraulic project, the person or government
26 agency shall, before commencing work thereon, secure the approval of
27 the department in the form of a permit as to the adequacy of the
28 means proposed for the protection of fish life.

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

31 (a) General plans for the overall project;

32 (b) Complete plans and specifications of the proposed
33 construction or work within the mean higher high water line in salt
34 water or within the ordinary high water line in fresh water;

35 (c) Complete plans and specifications for the proper protection
36 of fish life;

37 (d) Notice of compliance with any applicable requirements of the
38 state environmental policy act, unless otherwise provided for in this
39 chapter; and

1 (e) (~~Payment of all applicable application fees charged by the~~
2 ~~department under RCW 77.55.321~~) In the event that any person or
3 government agency desires to undertake mineral prospecting or mining
4 using motorized or gravity siphon equipment or desires to discharge
5 effluent from such an activity to waters of the state, the person or
6 government agency must also provide proof of compliance with the
7 requirements of the federal clean water act issued by the department
8 of ecology.

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

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

16 (5) With the exception of emergency permits as provided in
17 subsection (12) of this section, applications for permits must be
18 submitted to the department's headquarters office in Olympia.
19 Requests for emergency permits as provided in subsection (12) of this
20 section may be made to the permitting biologist assigned to the
21 location in which the emergency occurs, to the department's regional
22 office in which the emergency occurs, or to the department's
23 headquarters office.

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

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

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

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

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

38 (iii) The applicant requests a delay; or

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

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

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

11 (8) If the department denies approval of a permit, the department
12 shall provide the applicant a written statement of the specific
13 reasons why and how the proposed project would adversely affect fish
14 life.

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

19 (b) Issuance, denial, conditioning, or modification of a permit
20 may be informally appealed to the department within thirty days from
21 the date of receipt of the decision. Requests for informal appeals
22 must be filed in the form and manner prescribed by the department by
23 rule. A permit decision that has been informally appealed to the
24 department is appealable to the board within thirty days from the
25 date of receipt of the department's decision on the informal appeal.

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

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

32 (c) A permit remains in effect without need for periodic renewal
33 for hydraulic projects that divert water for agricultural irrigation
34 or stock watering purposes and that involve seasonal construction or
35 other work. A permit for stream bank stabilization projects to
36 protect farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020
37 remains in effect without need for periodic renewal if the problem
38 causing the need for the stream bank stabilization occurs on an
39 annual or more frequent basis. The permittee must notify the

1 appropriate agency before commencing the construction or other work
2 within the area covered by the permit.

3 (10) The department may, after consultation with the permittee,
4 modify a permit due to changed conditions. A modification under this
5 subsection is not subject to the fees provided under RCW 77.55.321.
6 The modification is appealable as provided in subsection (8) of this
7 section. For a hydraulic project that diverts water for agricultural
8 irrigation or stock watering purposes, when the hydraulic project or
9 other work is associated with stream bank stabilization to protect
10 farm and agricultural land as defined in RCW 84.34.020, the burden is
11 on the department to show that changed conditions warrant the
12 modification in order to protect fish life.

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

24 (12)(a) The department, the county legislative authority, or the
25 governor may declare and continue an emergency. If the county
26 legislative authority declares an emergency under this subsection, it
27 shall immediately notify the department. A declared state of
28 emergency by the governor under RCW 43.06.010 shall constitute a
29 declaration under this subsection.

30 (b) The department, through its authorized representatives, shall
31 issue immediately, upon request, verbal approval for a stream
32 crossing, or work to remove any obstructions, repair existing
33 structures, restore stream banks, protect fish life, or protect
34 property threatened by the stream or a change in the streamflow
35 without the necessity of obtaining a written permit prior to
36 commencing work. Conditions of the emergency verbal permit must be
37 reduced to writing within thirty days and complied with as provided
38 for in this chapter.

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

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

7 (13) All state and local agencies with authority under this
8 chapter to issue permits or other authorizations in connection with
9 emergency water withdrawals and facilities authorized under RCW
10 43.83B.410 shall expedite the processing of such permits or
11 authorizations in keeping with the emergency nature of such requests
12 and shall provide a decision to the applicant within fifteen calendar
13 days of the date of application.

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

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

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

7 (16) The department may issue an expedited written permit in
8 those instances where normal permit processing would result in
9 significant hardship for the applicant or unacceptable damage to the
10 environment. Expedited permit requests require a complete written
11 application as provided in subsection (2) of this section and must be
12 issued within fifteen calendar days of the receipt of a complete
13 written application. Approval of an expedited permit is valid for up
14 to sixty days from the date of issuance. The department may not
15 require the provisions of the state environmental policy act, chapter
16 43.21C RCW, to be met as a condition of issuing a permit under this
17 subsection.

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