

HB 2257 -1 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

House Committee On Water

Prepared By: Allison Daniel, LPRO Analyst

Sub-Referral To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Meeting Dates: 3/4, 3/30

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Appropriates \$500,000 from General Fund to Water Resources Department (WRD), for biennium beginning July 1, 2021, for purposes of facilitating enrollment of lands in Harney Basin in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP); funding position for hydrologist who will support implementation of contracts entered into under CRP, assist implementation of other projects intended to reduce ground water use in Harney Basin, assess effectiveness of participation in CRP and of other strategies for reducing ground water use, collect data on ground water levels in Harney Basin, monitor and estimate ground water use in Harney Basin, and support actions taken by District 10 watermaster that promote compliance with ground water use reduction programs; and measuring ground water levels in Harney Basin to assess effectiveness of ground water management programs. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Need for more information on Harney Basin ground water resources
- Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program match rate
- Potential for expanding program beyond the Harney Basin

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

-1 Changes “Conservation Reserve Program” to “Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.”

FISCAL: May have fiscal impact, but no statement yet issued.

REVENUE: No revenue impact.

BACKGROUND:

According to the United States Geological Survey’s Harney Basin Groundwater Study, demand for groundwater in the Harney Basin is increasing. Water uses include domestic, irrigated agriculture, livestock, and wildlife needs. Local and statewide stakeholders have identified a need to reduce groundwater use in the Harney Basin through either regulatory or voluntary mechanisms in order to achieve stable groundwater levels.

The Food Security Act of 1985 established the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as a voluntary federal program, overseen by the United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency. The CRP provides an annual rental payment to private landowners in exchange for the removal of environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and the planting of species that will improve environmental quality. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is an extension of the CRP that provides an annual rental payment for voluntary non-use of groundwater.

House Bill 2257 would appropriate \$500,000 to WRD, for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, to facilitate the enrollment of lands in the Harney Basin in the CRP, fund a hydrologist to support implementation of the program, and measure ground water levels in the Harney Basin.