



March 16, 2021
House Committee on Water
Representative Ken Helm, Chair

Informational Testimony on House Bill 3242
Racquel Rancier, Policy Manager

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information related to House Bill 3242. The Department is not taking a position on the bill, and this testimony is provided for informational purposes. In brief, House Bill 3242 bill would require the Department to summarize the current status of groundwater-related information for each groundwater basin, as well as develop recommendations for how to prioritize groundwater management and prioritize future groundwater basin studies.

Groundwater Challenges

In some locations throughout the state, groundwater sources are no longer capable of sustaining additional development. More information is needed to help the Department, communities, and water users make informed decisions to effectively manage groundwater resources. As discussed previously with the Committee, basin-scale groundwater studies are an important tool for the Department, providing the most in-depth analysis of the groundwater and surface water resources within an area. During these studies, the Department integrates all existing data and collects additional new data in order to develop comprehensive descriptions of otherwise unseen processes of the hydrologic cycle. These investigations help the Department make decisions about permitting and management of groundwater in the context of an entire basin. However, basin studies can take approximately four to six years to complete.

Understanding the state's groundwater resource requires integration of geologic and hydrologic data from wells, streams, and springs, as well as broader field studies and climatic data. The Department uses a number of data sources, as available, to understand groundwater including: geologic maps and subsurface maps, water-level data, pump and aquifer tests, well logs, and other technical information, as well as local, regional and basin reports and studies. While some amount of groundwater-related data and information exists for all areas of the state, some areas have more data and more analysis completed than others. In addition, where data does exist, due to limited resources, some data has not been analyzed or has not been synthesized in a manner that is accessible by decisionmakers, the public and communities.

House Bill 3242

House Bill 3242 directs the Department to summarize the current groundwater information available for each groundwater basin in the state and identify basin specific groundwater issues. The bill requires the department to develop recommendations for groundwater study prioritization, and methods for regularly reporting statewide consumptive ground water use, historical use of ground water to irrigate fields, and estimates of open water evaporation from all major reservoirs. The bill also directs the Department to identify a comprehensive groundwater level monitoring network, which the Department interprets to mean outlining an approach for expanding the groundwater level monitoring network. The bill also directs the Department to develop a report to the legislature on the costs and timing of developing specified groundwater data and studies, and on how to prioritize water management in basins. The bill appropriates \$250,000 to the Department to implement these directives.