

House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee

2/2/2026

Bill: 2nd substitute HB 187 – Water Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Jack

Floor Sponsor: Senator Ipson

UASD Position: Support

This Bill addresses water in the lower basin as defined by the Colorado River Compact.

Discussion: The sponsor explained that this Bill is designed to protect Utah's water rights in the Lower Colorado River Basin and provides water districts with greater flexibility to preserve and manage water rights for future use, particularly during periods of growth or drought.

Representative Jack clarified that there is a coordinating clause with HB 348.

Zachary Renstrom, General Manager of the Washington County Water Conservancy District, testified in support of the Bill and emphasized the importance of long-term water conservation and infrastructure planning. He cited the Virgin River Program as a successful example of regional coordination and expressed hope that this Bill will provide additional flexibility for water management. Representative Albrecht highlighted the critical role of the Virgin River to the southern part of the state and referenced the importance of power allocations from Glen Canyon Dam.

Representative Arthur asked how the proposed flexibility would function in practice. Mr. Renstrom responded that the Mojave Desert experiences floods and droughts and requires multi-year water storage to balance and manage supplies. He explained that this Bill removes limitations in the existing 40-year plan for water in southern Utah, allowing for more adaptive and strategic water planning. Providing this flexibility is essential to properly manage water in the desert, where water storage is a key component of sustainability. Adam Snow, Chair of the Colorado River Advisory Committee, spoke in support of the Bill. The Committee adopted the second substitute.

Yea: 9

Nay: 0

N/V: 5

Outcome: 2nd substitute HB 187 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: HB 349 – Statewide Water Storage

Sponsor: Representative Brooks

Floor Sponsor:

UASD Position: Track

This Bill addresses water storage within the state.

Discussion: The sponsor explained that the intent of HB 349 is to organize and coordinate the steps necessary for future reservoir development and noted that, under this Bill, water rights must be secured before reservoir construction can proceed. He emphasized that the goal is to ensure projects are ready to move forward within a five-year timeframe. The Bill also establishes new criteria for qualifying projects to receive state funding for reservoir construction.

Representative Albrecht asked whether the Bill would apply to infrastructure changes for existing dams or reservoirs, and the sponsor responded that the Bill does include provisions addressing such changes. Representative Chew spoke in support of the Bill.

The Vice President of Public Policy for the Utah Farm Bureau Federation testified in support while recommending the inclusion of groundwater storage and recharge projects. The Acting Director of the Utah Division of Water Resources also spoke in support of the Bill, as did the Executive Director of the Utah Rivers Council. Representative Arthur encouraged continued discussion regarding groundwater storage and recharge as part of the state's long-term water strategy.

Yea: 11
Nay: 0
N/V: 3

Outcome: HB 349 passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: SB 46 – Water Wise Landscaping Amendments

Sponsor: Senator Stratton
Floor Sponsor: Representative Snider
UASD Position: Track

This Bill addresses water wise landscaping requirements for public facilities.

Discussion: The Bill was not discussed in the Committee.

Yea:
Nay:
N/V:

Outcome: The Bill was not heard in the Committee.