Date: November 1, 2023

To: Water Policy Interim Committee (WPIC) members

 Jason Mohr, Research analyst

From: Ken Walsh, Chair WPIC

RE: Water Rights Information System (WRIS)

This is an update regarding the Legislative and more importantly WPIC’s oversight of the WRIS that DNRC has been tasked with. Since our last meeting, Senator Sales and I have had numerous conservations with DNRC regarding issues with the newly implemented query system. Furthermore, there are on-going challenges with the database, the processes/procedures issues identified in the recent Legislative audit report, and challenges that the Water Court and other users have identified that are of concern and raised “red flags”.

At our October committee meeting a motion was passed to form a subcommittee to further investigate the issues with all stakeholders and provide a forum for discussion, possible solutions/remedies, and what resources may be needed. In that regard, I and Senator Sales have visited Jason Mohr and determined that he has the ‘bench power’ to allocate time and resources for WPIC to lead this process as required by the Constitution and Statute.

To move this initiative forward, I’m proposing through a WPIC sub-committee hearing with all stakeholders to continue the dialogue, identifying the issues, prioritize those issues and seek solutions.

1. Appoint a sub-committee of WPIC to tentative meet Nov. 28. The committee would consist of: Senators Sales and Welborn, Representatives Cohenour and Carter, and myself. Of course, all members are encouraged and welcome to participate.
2. The agenda would be to have reports that would include identified concerns, from DNRC, Water Court, and all stakeholders (attorneys, consultants, water rights holders of agricultural, municipal, industrial, and others) to fully learn and understand the concerns, challenges, and suggested recommendations.
3. After questions and discussions determine priorities, develop actions plans, resources required and the role(s) that WPIC should be part of to achieve successful resolution.

Anna Pakenham Steveson of the DNRC has been proactive with outreach, and her team continues to identify solutions to the challenges presented. They have convened a sub-group of the Comprehensive Water Review and invited the Water Court to begin to compile a list of concerns that they will sort out and prioritize. Senator Sales and I have volunteered to participate as well. This will assist and provide a great starting point when we convene our WPIC subcommittee.

I have visited with Judge Brown from the Water Court, and they are looking forward to working with WPIC. He expressed that this will be an excellent opportunity for all three branches of the government, Legislature, Judicial, and Executive, to come together to discuss roles, duties and responsibilities, and challenges with the WRIS.

I encourage any thoughts and/or comments that you might have. I don’t want to exclude anyone, and your participation is encouraged and welcomed.