



## House Bills 5065-5073 and Senate Bills 721-729 Fact Sheet

### Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool: Where Science Ends and Values Begin

#### **Opposition Argument:**

Opponents assert that the newly designed Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool justifies their unreasonable demands for water from our rivers and streams. They claim their proposals are “backed by sound science,” which is a blatant distortion of what this tool can and cannot do.

#### **Response:**

The Water Withdrawal Assessment Tool uses sound science to combine existing data sets in a unique way. The result is a prediction: when you feed the elements of a proposed water withdrawal into the tool, it will report whether the withdrawal is likely to cause a negative impact on fish populations living in that stream.

The tool CANNOT make the value decision about what percentage of fish is acceptable to lose. It also does not tell what other impacts will result from removing that amount of water.

The approach included in the opposition-backed SB 860 would allow as much as 25 percent of stretches in waterways like the Jordan and the Sturgeon Rivers to be made available for withdrawal. Even if one believes the associated fish loss is acceptable, it does not justify lost riparian rights, reduced recreational uses, impacts to navigation or sediment loading.

The scientists who designed the tool have repeatedly stated that the tool does not – and was never intended to – make value judgments. The tool can only determine that when a certain amount of water is withdrawn, a certain percentage of fish will be lost, and vice versa. Therefore, it is appropriate that the tool be used for screening purposes only, and its use should be watched closely. The legislature should build in adequate funding for development and oversight of the tool, and allow its use to be adjusted in the future as it is improved. But its limitations justify careful implementation. And it only establishes a foundation upon which we must build the value-laden policy decisions.

“It can predict that if you take away a certain amount of water, which affects the stream flow and temperature, a certain number of fish will be lost. What is does NOT tell you is what percentage of fish is acceptable to lose. It also does not tell you what other impacts result when you remove that amount of water.”