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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

LAST UPDATED _____

SPONSOR Campos/Sedillo Lopez **ORIGINAL DATE** 2/6/2025

BILL

SHORT TITLE Max Penalty for Water Law Violation **NUMBER** Senate Bill 210

ANALYST Davidson

REVENUE* (dollars in thousands)

Type	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Penalty		\$80.0 to \$100.0	\$80.0 to \$100.0	\$80.0 to \$100.0	\$80.0 to \$100.0	Recurring	General Fund

Parentheses () indicate revenue decreases.

*Amounts reflect most recent analysis of this legislation.

Sources of Information

LFC Files

Agency Analysis Received From
Office of the State Engineer (OSE)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Senate Bill 210

Senate Bill 210 (SB210) proposes to amend sections of the Office of the State Engineer’s (OSE) statutory authority, increasing the penalty for Water Law Violation to \$2,000 per day, allowing OSE to increase the maximum penalty to account for inflation in future years, proposing heavier penalties to certain water law violations, and amends statute to state repayment in water, not in fines, would be preferred.

This bill does not contain an effective date and, as a result, would go into effect 90 days after the Legislature adjourns if enacted, or June 20, 2025.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

OSE did not provide an estimate as to how the increasing of penalties from \$100 per day to \$2,000 per day; OSE did note that increasing the penalty may actually deter violations. OSE processes roughly 40 to 50 enforcement actions a year. Using these numbers, LFC analysis estimates revenue has the potential to increase from \$4 to \$5 thousand in civil penalties a year to \$80 to \$100 thousand a year. However, this is dependent on a violation lasting a day. OSE analysis notes some violations can last weeks, months, and possibly longer. LFC analysis does not account for this variability.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

OSE notes the maximum penalty for a water law violation was set in 1907 at \$100 per day and has not been changed since. OSE also notes moving the date of accrual to the date of notice of violation is issued, in conjunction with increasing the penalty to \$2,000 a day, could make violations cost prohibitive to would be violators.

Analysis from OSE notes in most enforcement cases the agency seeks payback of water rather than money. This is typically done through compelling the enforced-on party to reduce future diversions by the quantity of water which was previously over-or illegally taken or diverted. OSE has found this practice is a successful deterrent against future diversions or breakings of water law.

However, OSE notes:

Not all violations of the Water Code can be remedied through the payback of water. Some violations are not over diversions at all; instead, they may be violations of metering or reporting requirements, or failure to comply with all regulations in the drilling of a well. Additionally, some violators of the Water Code may not have valid rights to satisfy a payback requirement. Therefore, monetary penalties are necessary to remedy these types of violations.

AD/rl/hj