

Subject Public Waters Inventory (PWI)

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Summary

This bill would prohibit the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) from modifying the public waters inventory (PWI) until July 1, 2027, and, by January 15, 2027, require the DNR to submit a report to the legislature on the modification process and any legislative changes necessary to ensure an opportunity for local government involvement and public comment.

The PWI is intended to provide maps and lists of water bodies that meet the statutory definition of “public waters” and is used by the DNR, local governments, and others to identify public waters, which are subject to certain regulations. The DNR completed the original PWI in the 1980’s, and the DNR has maintained the authority to revise the lists and maps to make corrections.

In 2024, a law was passed requiring the DNR to update the public waters inventory (PWI). There have been inconsistencies between the statutory definition of “public waters” and the maps and lists which has caused some question as to what is considered a “public water.” These inconsistencies have resulted in litigation.