

2026 Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. 1209

BY REPRESENTATIVE FIRMENT

WATER/RESOURCES: Provides for the withdrawal of surface water

1 AN ACT

2 To amend and reenact R.S. 30:961 and to enact R.S. 30:961(L), relative to cooperative  
3 endeavor agreements for the withdrawal of surface water; to provide for legislative  
4 intent and findings; to provide a sunset date for surface water withdrawal  
5 agreements; to require the secretary to consider potential introduction of invasive  
6 vegetation or wildlife species when forming agreements; and to provide for related  
7 matters.

8 Be it enacted by the Legislature of Louisiana:

9 Section 1. R.S. 30:961 is hereby amended and reenacted and R.S. 39:961(K) is  
10 hereby enacted to read as follows:

11 §961. Cooperative endeavor agreements; withdrawal of surface water; intent

12 A. Legislative intent and findings

13 (1) The legislature hereby finds and declares that the surface waters of the  
14 state of Louisiana are among its most valuable natural resources and are essential to  
15 the state's economy, environment, public safety, and quality of life.

16 (2) The legislature further finds that the responsible management of surface  
17 water resources requires a balanced approach that supports economic development  
18 while ensuring the long-term sustainability and usability of the state's waterways.

19 (3) The legislature recognizes that invasive aquatic vegetation and species  
20 including but not limited to giant salvinia, water hyacinth, and hydrilla pose a

1 significant and growing threat to Louisiana's lakes, rivers, and other water bodies by  
2 impairing navigation, increasing flood risk, degrading wildlife habitat, and limiting  
3 public access.

4 (4) The legislature further finds that aquatic vegetation overgrowth and  
5 invasive species infestations can render water bodies unusable for commerce,  
6 recreation, and resource management if not effectively controlled.

7 (5) Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to:

8 (a) Ensure that the use and withdrawal of surface water resources contributes  
9 to the preservation and maintenance of those resources.

10 (b) Support a statewide, coordinated approach to aquatic vegetation  
11 management and invasive species control.

12 (c) Provide for research, monitoring, and long-term management strategies  
13 to address invasive aquatic species.

14 (d) Establish sustainable funding mechanisms to assist in the protection and  
15 restoration of Louisiana's waterways for the benefit of present and future  
16 generations.

17 B. As provided by this Chapter and except as otherwise provided by law, a  
18 person or entity may enter into a cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw  
19 running surface water as described in this Chapter. The cooperative endeavor  
20 agreement shall prohibit the resale of withdrawn running surface water for a price  
21 greater than provided for in the agreement; however, a person or entity may receive  
22 compensation for the transportation, manufacturing, or processing of withdrawn  
23 running surface water. Unless otherwise provided by law, all cooperative endeavor  
24 agreements to withdraw running surface water, and any assignment of such  
25 agreement, shall be approved by the secretary as provided in this Chapter. No  
26 provision contained in this Chapter should be construed as a requirement for any  
27 person or entity to enter into any cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw  
28 running surface water. This Chapter shall have no effect on the rights provided for  
29 in Civil Code Articles 657 and 658 or any rights held by riparian owners in

1           accordance with the laws of this state. It is also the intent of the legislature that  
2           should any portion of this Chapter be found to be unconstitutional that the remaining  
3           parts shall continue in force and effect.

4           ~~B. C.~~ C. No agency or subdivision of the state otherwise authorized to enter into  
5           a cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw running surface water, or assignment  
6           of such shall do so unless the agreement is in writing, provides for fair market value  
7           to the state, is in the public interest, and is contained on a uniform form developed  
8           and prescribed by the State Mineral and Energy Board and approved by the attorney  
9           general. Except when water is withdrawn from bodies of water managed by the  
10          Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and determined by the office of fisheries to be  
11          negatively impacted by invasive aquatic vegetation, fair market value to the state  
12          shall include but not be limited to the economic development, employment, and  
13          increased tax revenues created by the activities associated with the withdrawal of  
14          running surface water. No such cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw  
15          running surface water shall be valid unless and until such agreement is approved by  
16          the secretary following the submission of an application for approval, which the  
17          secretary shall develop and prescribe. The secretary shall conduct the evaluation  
18          provided for in Subsection ~~D~~ E of this Section and take action on the application  
19          within sixty days of the application being deemed complete. If the secretary denies  
20          the application, the secretary shall provide written reasons for the denial at the time  
21          of the denial.

22          ~~E. D.~~ D. Unless otherwise provided by law, the secretary is authorized to enter  
23          into any cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw running surface water,  
24          provided that any such agreement complies with the prohibition against gratuitous  
25          donation of state property by ensuring that the state receives fair market value for  
26          any water removed, and the substance of the agreement is contained within a written  
27          cooperative endeavor agreement as provided for in Article VII, Section 14 of the  
28          Constitution of Louisiana.

1           ~~D.~~ E. The secretary shall evaluate each application for a cooperative  
2           endeavor agreement to withdraw running surface water and each such cooperative  
3           endeavor that he may enter to ensure that each is in the public interest. The secretary  
4           shall ensure the proposed agreement is based on best management practices and  
5           sound science, and is consistent with the required balancing of environmental and  
6           ecological impacts with the economic and social benefits found in Article IX,  
7           Section 1 of the Constitution of Louisiana. In his evaluation, the secretary shall also  
8           ensure that all cooperative endeavor agreements to withdraw running surface water,  
9           or assignments of such, adequately consider the potential and real effects of such  
10          contracted activity on the sustainability of the water body and on navigation. Any  
11          assignment of any such cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw running surface  
12          water may be approved by the secretary in the same manner as an agreement as  
13          provided in this Section, unless otherwise provided for by law.

14           ~~E.~~ F.(1) A cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw running surface  
15          water, or an assignment of such, entered into pursuant to the provisions of this  
16          Chapter shall have an initial term not to exceed two years. No new cooperative  
17          endeavor agreement shall be entered into for any application that was received by the  
18          department after December 31, 2026; however, except as otherwise provided in this  
19          Subsection, Existing existing agreements may be renewed in two-year increments  
20          but shall terminate no later than December 31, 2036.

21           (2) A person or entity who has entered into a cooperative endeavor  
22          agreement to withdraw running surface waters or has obtained an assignment of  
23          such, may terminate such agreement after December 31, ~~2022~~ 2028. In order to be  
24          effective, the person or entity seeking to terminate shall provide written notice by  
25          certified mail to the secretary at least thirty days prior to termination.

26           ~~F.~~ G. The secretary may act to protect the natural resources of the state by  
27          reducing any withdrawal of water from the running surface waters of the state  
28          otherwise agreed to be withdrawn pursuant to an agreement entered into pursuant to  
29          this Chapter, or make other conditions, including the suspension or termination of

1 such withdrawal of water when such an action is required to protect the resource and  
2 to maintain sustainability and environmental and ecological balance. If the secretary  
3 acts to reduce or suspend the volume of water agreed to be withdrawn, he shall do  
4 so in such a manner that the total necessary reductions are proportionally borne by  
5 all users of the running surface waters, subject to this Chapter, in the area for which  
6 a reduction is required. Prior to approval, the secretary shall ensure that each  
7 contract or agreement or assignment thereof that involved the withdrawal of the  
8 running surface waters of the state provides for the secretary's authority, without  
9 liability for damages, in this regard.

10 ~~G.~~ H.(1) The secretary, in deciding whether to approve or require changes  
11 in an application for a cooperative endeavor agreement to withdraw running surface  
12 water, or assignment of such, shall consider the various existing and potential users  
13 of the resource and shall give appropriate consideration and priority to the following  
14 users or uses in the following order of priority:

15 (a) Human consumption by means of a public water system or a private water  
16 system that provides domestic potable water service.

17 (b) Agricultural uses that provide sustenance to animals or irrigation to  
18 plants.

19 (c) Any commercial purpose or other industrial or mining activity.

20 (2) The secretary shall also consider the impact of any proposed contract,  
21 agreement, assignment, or use on resource planning. By way of illustration but not  
22 limitation, these would include any potential project or use that impacts:

23 (a) Stream or water flow energy.

24 (b) Sediment load and distribution.

25 (c) Navigation.

26 (d) Aquatic life.

27 (e) ~~Other vegetation or wildlife~~ Aquatic vegetation and wildlife impacts,  
28 including the presence, proliferation, management, control, mitigation, and potential  
29 eradication of invasive aquatic vegetation and species including but not limited to

1        giant salvinia, water hyacinth, hydrilla, alligator weed, and other invasive or noxious  
2        aquatic plants or organisms that may impair water flow, navigation, flood control,  
3        ecological balance, or public use of state waters.

4                (3) The management of cooperative endeavor agreements to withdraw  
5        running surface water shall be consistent with the comprehensive master plan for  
6        coastal restoration and protection as approved by the Coastal Protection and  
7        Restoration Authority Board and the legislature.

8                H. I. Approval of an application for a cooperative endeavor agreement to  
9        withdraw running surface water or assignment of such pursuant to this Chapter does  
10       not obviate the need for other permits or authorizations required by law for any  
11       proposed activity.

12                F. J. Any cooperative endeavor agreement approved or entered into by the  
13       secretary pursuant to the Section which provides for the withdrawal of running  
14       surface water for use outside the boundaries of the state of Louisiana shall require  
15       the approval of the House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment and  
16       the Senate Committee on Natural Resources. In determining whether to approve  
17       such agreement, the committees shall consider the reasonableness of the withdrawal,  
18       whether the withdrawal is contrary to the conservation and uses of the running  
19       surface water, and whether the withdrawal is detrimental to the environment or the  
20       public welfare.

21                J. K. The state shall be reimbursed at fair market value for all use or  
22       withdrawal of running surface water from bodies of water managed by the  
23       Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and determined by the office of fisheries to be  
24       negatively impacted by invasive aquatic vegetation. Fair market value as used in this  
25       Subsection shall be at a rate of not more than fifteen cents per thousand gallons, and  
26       shall not include the economic development, employment, and increased tax  
27       revenues created by the activities associated with the withdrawal of running surface  
28       water.

1           ~~K. L.~~ All monies collected by the state pursuant to this Chapter as a result  
2           of the use or withdrawal of surface water shall be deposited into the Aquatic Plant  
3           Control Dedicated Fund Account as established in R.S. 56:10.1, and shall be used  
4           for the treatment of aquatic weed, preferably on the body of water from which  
5           revenues were generated.

DIGEST

The digest printed below was prepared by House Legislative Services. It constitutes no part of the legislative instrument. The keyword, one-liner, abstract, and digest do not constitute part of the law or proof or indicia of legislative intent. [R.S. 1:13(B) and 24:177(E)]

HB 1209 Original

2026 Regular Session

Firmment

**Abstract:** Provides legislative findings and intent, a sunset date for surface water withdrawal cooperative endeavor agreements, and for the secretary's consideration of potential introduction of invasive vegetation or wildlife species when entering agreements.

Present law provides for cooperative endeavor agreements to withdraw running surface water with requirement for the approval by the secretary and prohibition for the resale of withdrawn water, reserving the rights provided under present law and stating the intent of the legislature for severability of provisions.

Proposed law retains present law provisions and adds further legislative intent and findings to recognize the importance of the surface waters of the state on the economy and lives of La. residents and to acknowledge the impact to surface waters and the aquatic habitat of their withdrawal.

Present law provides for cooperative endeavor agreements to withdraw running surface water entered into pursuant to present law to have an initial term not to exceed two years and to be renewable in two-year increments.

Proposed law prohibits new agreements to be entered for which an application is received by the dept. after Dec. 31, 2026.

Proposed law retains the provision of present law for contracts to be renewed in two-year increments, but adds a required termination date of Dec. 31, 2036.

Present law provides for the secretary to consider the impact of entering withdrawal of surface water cooperative endeavor agreements on vegetation or wildlife.

Proposed law adds further specificity to present law impacts including the presence, proliferation, management, control, mitigation, and potential eradication of invasive aquatic vegetation and species such as giant salvinia, water hyacinth, hydrilla, alligator weed, and other invasive or noxious aquatic plants or organisms that may impair water flow, navigation, flood control, ecological balance, or public use of state waters.

(Amends R.S. 30:961; Adds R.S. 30:961(L))