



Alaska State Legislature Representative John Harris

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Sponsor Statement

HB 392 – “An Act relating to the use and appropriation of water.”

Alaska produces vast amounts of fresh water, a fact that the founding fathers of state government took into account when they wrote the constitution. In [Article VIII, Sec. 13](#), they proscribed the use of the surface and subsurface waters, setting up a framework that is the basis for state laws and regulations that have been enacted over the years.

However, the management of the peoples’ use and access to their water has become unwieldy, cumbersome and inefficient. HB 392 seeks to give direction to the Department of Natural Resources and correct some of the inefficiencies.

First, the bill removes a \$50 per year fee DNR currently charges for processing water use permits, even when there is no change to the permit holder’s usage. It is the sponsor’s view that if the permit holder seeks to increase usage or add a new well, for example, a permit fee would then more accurately reflect the work DNR would be required to do.

Second, HB 392 adds agricultural use of water as the second priority, after domestic usage, to assure the agricultural community that farmers will have access to the irrigation their crops will need.

Third, the bill adds a definition for what constitutes “significant use” to mean the use of one million gallons per day or more for 100 consecutive days in a calendar year. It also allows for the renewal of a permit of up to five years for significant use of water.

Finally, HB 392 seeks to provide an efficiency for temporary water users who often do not get their permits until after the water was needed. For example, a contractor who needs water to keep dust under control at a road construction site may not get his permit for the water until weeks after it would have been needed. HB 392 permits the temporary use unless the commissioner takes an action to deny it.

Alaska holds an exceedingly valuable resource in its fresh water, which will be more in demand in the future. [HB 392](#) will help to lay the groundwork for a modern, efficient management regime for our state’s water.