



VERMONT LEGISLATIVE
Joint Fiscal Office

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Fiscal Note

March 16, 2026

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S.223 – An act relating to water quality of the waters of Vermont

As Passed by the Senate¹ⁱ

Bill Summary

This bill would create an 11-member Water Quality, Lake Classification, and Antidegradation Study Group. The Study Group would be required to submit a report with its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly on or before December 15, 2026.

The Study Group created by this bill would cost approximately \$14,000 to the General Assembly in fiscal year 2027.

Fiscal Impact

Per diem compensation and expense reimbursement for the Study Group is expected to cost approximately \$14,000 to the General Assembly in fiscal year 2027.

As passed by the Senate, the payment of per diem compensation and expense reimbursement for the Study Group would be contingent upon an appropriation being made to the General Assembly in fiscal year 2027 for this specific purpose.

Background and Details

This bill would create an 11-member Water Quality, Lake Classification, and Antidegradation Study Group. The Study Group would be charged with evaluating various elements of Vermont's water classification designations, antidegradation requirements, and regulatory frameworks. The Study Group would then present recommendations to the General Assembly on legislative or policy changes to strengthen environmental protection, provide regulatory certainty, and support public uses of State waters.

The Study Group would be comprised of:

- Two current members of the House of Representatives, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House;
- Two current members of the Senate, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees;

¹ *The Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) is a nonpartisan legislative office dedicated to producing unbiased fiscal analysis – this fiscal note is meant to provide information for legislative consideration, not to provide policy recommendations.*

- The Secretary of Natural Resources or designee;
- A Department of Environmental Conservation water quality scientist or technical staff member, appointed by the Secretary of Natural Resources;
- Two persons representing businesses, industries, or development that interact with water quality permitting, including the State antidegradation policy, use of high quality waters, and water classification, one of whom shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House and one of whom shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees;
- Two persons representing nonprofit environmental advocacy groups, one of whom shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House and one of whom shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees; and
- One person representing the Federation of Vermont Lakes and Ponds, appointed by the Governor.

The Study Group would have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) and the legal and drafting assistance of the Office of Legislative Counsel. The Secretary of Natural Resources would be required to call the first meeting of the Study Group to occur on or before August 1, 2026. The Study Group would be required to submit a report to the General Assembly on or before December 15, 2026, and would cease to exist on February 15, 2027.

Legislators and members of the Study Group who are not State employees would be entitled to per diem compensation and expense reimbursement for not more than 8 meetings. These costs for both legislative and non-legislative members of the Study Group would be paid from the budget of the General Assembly at an expected cost of approximately \$14,000 in fiscal year 2027.

In the bill, as passed by the Senate, the per diem compensation and reimbursement of expenses for the members of the Study Group would be contingent upon an appropriation of funds in fiscal year 2027 from the General Fund to the General Assembly for the specific purpose of compensation and reimbursement of the Study Group members.

ⁱ The full fiscal note history is available on the fiscal tab of the bill page on the General Assembly website and can be pulled up through a bill number search on the JFO page.