

Perdue's water conservation plan passes through legislature
By Ashley Speagle

ATLANTA - The Georgia legislature passed Gov. Sonny Perdue's water conservation plan Wednesday that will encourage conservation and renewal of state water.

"Both the House and Senate took major steps today towards our goal of creating a true culture of conservation in Georgia," said Gov. Perdue in a media release.

The plan was based on suggestions from Gov. Perdue's Water Contingency Task Force and would help Georgia prepare for more droughts and the possible loss of water from Lake Lanier, Gov. Perdue said at an earlier Capitol press conference.

The state is appealing a federal judge's ruling that Georgia must stop using Lake Lanier water, a decision that came out of a longstanding lawsuit between Georgia, Florida and Alabama.

Gov. Perdue released two identical bills in both the House and Senate, whose sponsors made sure the bills retained identical changes as they went through committees.

Both bills went before the House and Senate floor Wednesday, passing unanimously in the Senate and by a 166-5 vote in the House.

The bills will now swap chambers, but should breeze to the floors for final passage having already undergone committee review in the opposite chamber.

As in his original plan, the bills will require water-efficient fixtures in new construction, efficient cooling towers and special metering in new residential and commercial developments.

The bills also will require the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to further develop a statewide water conservation plan by August 1 this year, which the legislature will oversee.

However, Gov. Perdue had said he wanted to create incentives for local governments to implement their own water conservation and development programs, incentives he intended to be developed in committees.

The House and Senate committees, though, left the creation of such incentives up to a Joint Committee on Water Supply created in Gov. Perdue's plan.

"This legislation promotes water conservation in Georgia and shows our neighbors that we are serious about being good stewards of our natural resources," said Gov. Perdue.

The Senate bill's sponsor, Sen. Ross Tolleson, R-Perry, told his colleagues on the floor that the bill received positive reviews from Alabama press and officials.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce also applauded the water conservation plan's passage, whose own members made up a significant portion of the Water Task Force that recommended the plan.

"This bill will help both businesses and citizens of our state be more mindful of their water use and become better stewards overall - ensuring adequate statewide water supplies for future needs," said president and CEO George Israel in a media release.

HB 1094 & SB 370

-On or before August 1, 2010, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources shall examine their practices, programs, policies, rules, and regulations to identify opportunities to provide enhanced programming and incentives for voluntary water conservation.

-By January 1, 2012, public water systems serving at least 10,000 individuals, and by January 1, 2013, all other public water systems, shall have conducted a water loss audit pursuant to the minimum standards and best practices adopted by the Board of Natural Resources.

-Persons may irrigate outdoors daily for purposes of planting, growing, managing, or maintaining ground cover, trees, shrubs, or other plants only between the hours of 4 P.M. and 10:00 A.M., with exceptions, to become effective not later than January 1, 2011.

-There shall be established three categories of farm use surface water and ground-water withdrawal permits: active, inactive, and unused.

-All new multiunit residential, retail and light industrial buildings permitted on or after July 1, 2012, shall be constructed in a manner which will permit the measurement by a county, municipal, or other public water system or by the owner or operator of water use by each unit.

-On or before July 1, 2012, the Department of Community Affairs, with the approval of the board, shall amend applicable state minimum standard codes to require the installation of high-efficiency plumbing fixtures in all new construction permitted on or after July 1, 2012.

-After July 1, 2012, the sale of a gravity tank-type, flushometer-valve, or flushometer-tank toilet that uses more than an average of 1.6 1.28 gallons of water per flush shall be is prohibited in this state.

-On or before July 1, 2012, the department, with the approval of the board, shall amend applicable state minimum standard codes to require the installation of high-efficiency cooling towers in new construction permitted on or after July 1, 2012.

-There is created the 10-member Joint Committee on Water Supply to be composed that shall study and analyze the state's reservoir system and state's strategic needs for additional water supply, identifying creative financing options for water reservoirs and

other opportunities for water supply enhancement and shall stand abolished on December 31, 2010.