



Oregon
Environmental
Council
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222 NW Davis Street
Suite 309
Portland, OR 97209-3900
503.222.1963
www.oeconline.org

Testimony to the House Energy & Environment Committee on House Bill 2623

February 7th, 2019

**Morgan Gratz-Weiser, Legislative Director
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports HB 2623 imposing a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in Oregon in order to safeguard water resources.

Hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking” takes an enormous amount of water. According to the US Geological Survey, fracking on average uses over 2 million gallons of water per well for oil and over 4 million gallons of water per well for natural gas extraction. These are averages – some wells use even more.

Although some fracked water is recycled (the quantity is unknown because companies are not required to report that information), most water is too contaminated for other productive uses. Up to 600 chemicals may be used in fracking operations, including known carcinogens and toxics such as formaldehyde, lead and mercury. In total, around 40,000 gallons of chemicals are used per fracturing.¹ Wastewater is either reinjected into the ground or held in containment pools. There are concerns that both fracking and injected wastewater can migrate and taint drinking water resources; according to ProPublica, there have been over 1000 documented cases by courts as well as state and local governments of contamination next to areas of gas drilling.²

As noted in the December, 2016 Oregon Secretary of State Audit Report on the Water Resources Department:

“Parts of the state are experiencing regular and large-scale water supply availability issues. There are indications that this trend will continue, intensify, and spread. Many water sources in the state have been fully allocated, and groundwater levels are decreasing in several areas. By 2050, Oregon could be faced with a need for an additional 424 billion gallons of water per year to meet irrigation needs and municipal and industrial demand. Though Oregon is known as a rainy place, there is a limited amount of consumable water available for meeting all existing needs and new uses.” Already this year over 90% of Oregon is in moderate drought, with 75% of the state in “severe drought”, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.³

Over 70% of Oregon residents get their drinking water from groundwater, with over 90% of the state's public water systems drawing from groundwater sources. Once groundwater becomes contaminated, it is extremely difficult and costly to clean up, and contamination can persist for many years and generations. Contamination can impair use of groundwater as a source for drinking water, threaten public health, and impact the quality of rivers and streams fed by groundwater.

The Oregon Environmental Council and our membership base supports clean, reliable water resources and that we must protect against practices that harm our waters. There are well-documented and substantial concerns regarding fracking on local water and the health of local residents, and a moratorium on such practices should be put in place.

¹ <http://www.dangersoffracking.org>

² <http://www.propublica.org/article/buried-secrets-is-natural-gas-drilling-endangering-us-water-supplies-1113>

³ <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?OR>