

## **Testimony to the House Committee on Energy and the Environment on House Bill 2819**

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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 strongly supports HB 2819.**

HB 2819 requires the Oregon Water Resources Department to establish a pilot program enabling the Umatilla Basin to begin to stabilize and recover its deep basalt groundwater aquifers.

HB 2819 implements many of the region's long-standing "place-based" plans to optimize existing and newly mitigated Columbia River water rights. HB 2819 will allow the basin to maintain and grow its value-added natural resource-based economy while taking pressures off of the over-stressed aquifers needed to maintain municipal growth and ensure a water supply portfolio for future generations that is resilient in the face of regional drought and global climate change.

Specifically, HB 2819 establishes a pilot program that does two things:

1. Protects existing water rights and resources by
  - a. Ensuring that willing landowners participating in the program are protected from losing their senior groundwater rights
  - b. Ensuring that the state will protect from appropriation by other water users the groundwater saved by participating landowners throughout the duration of this test
2. Protects the financial stability of participating landowners by providing funding for a limited amount of time by
  - a. Off-setting the difference between costs of using more expensive, yet more sustainable Columbia River water, and cheaper yet more vulnerable groundwater supplies
  - b. Ensuring that water rights holders participating in groundwater recovery pilot program will not be negatively impacted financially by wanting to do the right thing

HB 2819 is the next step in a multi-biennial water management plan that the Umatilla Basin region made with the state and multiple stakeholders during the 2015 Legislative Session. Short and long-term commitments were made by water rights holders, neighbors, interest groups and the State during transparent and formal planning efforts and we must honor those commitments. Passage of HB 2819 will demonstrate follow-

through to the Umatilla Basin as well as other basins embarking on their own long-term water planning and implementation strategies.

Across Oregon, there is a groundswell of interest, energy and commitment to establishing a coordinated long-term vision for the state's water resources and infrastructure. Place-based planning efforts are key to this effort. Even though the HB 2819 pilot program is for the Umatilla Basin, other basins are or soon will be in a position to implement their own place-based plans. Those efforts will be encouraged by the passage of HB 2819 and educated by the outcome of the pilot program.

The Umatilla Basin efforts represent an example of what can be achieved if we are able to capitalize on local institutional knowledge and develop the institutional capacity to implement long-term, multi-biennial water plans at a regional level.

**Oregon Environmental Council urges you to pass HB 2819 at the full funding level requested.**