



April 30, 2019
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senator Michael Dembrow, Chair

Testimony on House Bill 2084
Submitted by Tom Byler, Director

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2084, which extends authority to assist with place-based integrated water resources planning.

Background Information

Water is essential for drinking, economic growth and development, job creation, and the livelihoods of many farmers and ranchers across the state. In addition, water is necessary for fish and wildlife, recreation, and other instream purposes that are important to Oregonians. Given the importance of water, in order for a region to achieve their vision for the future, they must consider how their long-term water resources needs will be met. Planning is essential to being able to formulate solutions to water challenges that may affect communities, ecosystems, and economic development.

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature authorized the Water Resources Department to pilot the place-based approach to integrated water resources planning. Place-based integrated water resources planning provides an opportunity for communities to work collaboratively, in partnership with the state, to understand their water resources challenges and needs, and identify potential solutions to meet those needs. Building trust and developing long-term relationships are additional benefits that can be realized through place-based strategies; these are important foundations for successful implementation of tangible water resources projects.

Need for Extension of Sunset

The authority for the state to assist groups with place-based planning sunsets on July 1, 2019. The Department has been working with four places to pilot place-based planning, and all of the areas need additional time to work on plan development, as well as implementation strategies. Continuing to undertake place-based planning is Recommended Action 9.A of Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

Work to Date

Building trust and creating a shared understanding necessary to collaboratively develop a place-based plan is time-intensive and requires investments in facilitation, process coordination, and technical analysis. To date, the communities have put forward a significant amount of time and resources, with a 2:1 match of funds. They have shown dedication to the process and many of the participants have already observed benefits from collaborative planning.

Specifically, place-based planning has allowed participants to get to know new people that share an interest in water, collaboratively work through differences, and identify opportunities to work together. It has also allowed the State to become a partner in proactively understanding and addressing complex water problems at a local scale. The planning efforts have increased local access to agency technical information and helped communities better understand existing data gaps and resource limitations. The Department anticipates that the resulting plans will help inform future strategic investments to meet current and long-term water needs, identifying solutions that are widely supported and competitive for funding opportunities.

What the bill does

Place-based integrated water resources planning is a voluntary, locally initiated and led effort in which a balanced representation of water interests within a basin or watershed, work in partnership with the state to understand their instream and out-of-stream water needs, and identify solutions to meet those needs.

This bill proposes to extend the sunset date to 2023 to allow the state to continue to pilot the place-based approach to water planning. This would allow the Department to continue to provide financial and technical assistance to the communities currently using this approach and enable them to finish their work, completing the pilot phase. Thereafter, the Department intends to conduct a review of this approach to water planning to identify potential opportunities for improvement, evaluate the benefits, and determine next steps.