



## WaterWatch of Oregon

### Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

#### Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon (Brian Posewitz) on SB 1511 Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

February 6, 2020

WaterWatch of Oregon is a non-profit river conservation organization founded in 1985. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers, lakes and streams to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses. We also work for balanced water laws and policies, and for protection and restoration of the free-flowing character of Oregon's rivers and streams. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants, and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch is neutral on Senate Bill 1511.

SB 1511 is the latest in a series of proposals from Silvies Valley Ranch to exempt certain structures in stream channels – variously called “artificial beaver dams,” “restoration check dams” and, now, “restoration weirs” – from certain environmental laws. Silvies believes these structures can help restore “incised” streams (streams that erode into narrow channels disconnected from their floodplains) by recreating the hydrological effects of beaver dams that disappeared after beavers were largely eradicated through trapping and habitat destruction.

WaterWatch has been involved in this issue since a bill was first proposed at the request of Silvies in 2015 (HB 3217). WaterWatch opposed that bill and a similar bill in 2019 (HB 3132). WaterWatch is neutral on SB 1511 because, unlike prior versions of the bill, SB 1511 contains important safeguards to protect fish passage, water quality and instream flows. In particular, SB 1511 requires compliance with fish passage laws where “native migratory fish” are currently present,<sup>1</sup> requires authorized structures to “not store or appropriate water,” and gives the state authority to require modifications to structures found to be injuring existing water rights or causing significant detrimental impacts to native migratory fish.

WaterWatch appreciates the efforts of Silvies and the sponsors (of this bill and its predecessors) to address our concerns.

Contacts: Brian Posewitz, WaterWatch of Oregon, (503) 295-4039 x 2, [brian@waterwatch.org](mailto:brian@waterwatch.org).  
Jack Dempsey, (503) 358-2864, [jack@dempseypublicaffairs.com](mailto:jack@dempseypublicaffairs.com)

---

<sup>1</sup> “Native migratory fish” is a defined term that includes fish migrating solely within a local stream system.