



March 4, 2021

To House Committee on Water

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Support for HB 2257 – Hydrologist Position in the Harney Basin

Chair Helm and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) supports HB 2257. OACD represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners. The Harney Soil and Water Conservation Districts works with landowners in the Harney Basin, providing technical assistance throughout the county.

OACD supports HB 2257 as one of the tools needed in the Harney Basin to alleviate lowering groundwater levels. This area provides a vital agricultural industry and a dynamic high desert ecosystem. Long term collaboration in the area, as Representative Owens described earlier this week in the hearing on HB 3105, has been productive in identifying needed solutions. We support the tools outlined in HB 2257:

- Facilitating enrollment in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CREP) under the Farm Bill;
- Implementation of contracts under the CREP program with landowners;
- Funding of a hydrologist to assess program results in the basin;
- Collection of data of groundwater levels to assess success under CREP or other local solutions;
- Support of actions by the District 10 Watermaster; and
- Measurement of groundwater levels in the basin to assess management programs effectiveness.

The basin continues to see lowering of the water table and putting these tools in place will support the cooperative work being accomplished by those participating in the local work group.

We also support other identified tools that can obtain results in the basin:

- The USGS study envisioned in HB 2018; and
- Continuing funding under HB 3105 for place-based planning.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your decision-making process.

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