



OREGON FOREST & INDUSTRIES COUNCIL
SUSTAINABILITY. SCIENCE. INNOVATION. GROWTH.

HB 2821 Testimony
House Water Committee
March 11, 2021

Chair Helm and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2821. Our coalition represents farmers, ranchers, and foresters across the state who are interested in protecting, maintaining and enhancing water quality across our farms and forests. The agricultural and forestry sectors have always been proactive about protecting, maintaining and enhancing water quality on agricultural and forestry lands, which combined represents by far the largest land use in the state. Indeed, our industries were proactive in developing the Agricultural Water Quality Management Program and Forest Practices Act years before most states had thought of developing their nonpoint source programs. Since that time, we have invested millions in studies, on-the-ground restoration and active management, and compliance with our respective programs. We will continue to be proactive into the future, as evidenced by the millions invested by each of our sectors annually in proactive water quality improvements.

Over the last few years, the issue harmful algal blooms (HAB) became front and center in Oregon's ongoing water quality conversations. While the primary impact of HABs is on drinking water, the impacts extended into the food processing sector, recreation, and other sectors dependent on a clean, safe water supply.

However, understanding the causes and how to address HABs in the long-term is a complex issue that must involve a diverse cross-section of stakeholders and water quality experts. HB 2821 requires DEQ to "identify sources of pollutants that contribute to the occurrences of harmful algal blooms" and "develop strategies for reducing pollutants that contribute to the occurrences of harmful algal blooms and the frequency and severity of harmful algal blooms." It also requires DEQ to "develop pollution reduction plans for point sources and nonpoint sources identified" as potential sources of pollution that contributes to HABs. As all the state agencies that work on this issue state, understanding what contributes to HABs is a complex exercise as the causes are often diffuse and exacerbated by a number of factors outside the state's control. As such, any work to identify and address HABs must account for all factors impacting HABs, rely on the best available science and involve all impacted stakeholders.

The state already has a number of agencies working on nonpoint source water quality, each of which has their own extensive body of scientific research and data on their sector. As such, it is critical that any program designed to address HABs occur within the framework already in existence for addressing nonpoint source water quality, rely on the expertise of the Department of Forestry and Department of Agriculture, include

those with scientific expertise on these issues, and include natural resources stakeholders.

A number of us have participated in the Committee's workgroup to determine what is needed to address HABs within Oregon. We've worked through this group to help educate about Oregon's existing water quality programs and ensure that all the relevant state agencies are communicating and working together within Oregon's existing water quality framework to develop a long-term plan for identifying and addressing HABs. Most of the initial work has focused around getting drinking water providers the tools they need to identify HABs in their water source and ensure a safe drinking water supply for their customers.

HB 2821 does not account for this work, and seeks instead to create a new water quality framework specific to HABs housed within DEQ. This risks unnecessary duplication of resources, fails to account for the ongoing work of each agency within their respective water quality program, and unnecessarily blurs the lines between drinking water requirements and the state's overall water quality program. Additionally, given that much of the source water for drinking water systems around the state is within forested and agricultural watersheds, we think it is critical that these agencies and stakeholders are engaged in any source water protection work developed through this workgroup to avoid duplication of resources, ensure there is an understanding of the state of current scientific work about agriculture and forestry's contribution to water quality, and ensure that any source water protection goals are achievable and appropriately focused on areas that will actually make a difference. We oppose HB 2821 because it fails to account for all of these issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 2821. We look forward to staying engaged around how to best address ongoing HAB issues around the state.

Oregon Farm Bureau

Oregon Small Woodlands Association

Oregon Cattlemen's Association

Oregon Forest & Industries Council

Oregonians for Food & Shelter

Oregon Wheat League

Oregon Seed Council

Associated Oregon Hazelnuts Industry