

February 22, 2023

TO: House Committee on Agriculture, Natural Resources, Land Use and Water

SUBJECT: Support for HB 3163 Establishing a Place-based Water Planning Fund

Dear Chair Helm, Vice Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Owens and members of the Committee

For the record, I am Brenda Smith I am the Harney County Watershed Council Co-Convener for Place-Based Water Planning. I am here today to express our strong support for HB 3163 that will establish a Place-based Water Planning Fund.

Across the Harney Basin, water scarcity may prove to be the community's most important challenge. Harney County must balance its thriving agricultural economy that helps support a vibrant community with an arid climate, declining water table, and the drinking water wells and groundwater dependent ecosystems that rely on the aquifer. Currently, groundwater discharge, primarily used for irrigation purposes, exceeds the amount of natural recharge the Harney Basin receives.

In 2016 the Harney County Watershed Council applied for and was one of 4 communities to embark on a place-based approach to integrated water resources planning. Engaging partners and community, working together and having sufficient funding, are critical to meet the challenges facing the Harney Basin. We believed that in 2016 and we continue to believe this in 2023.

One of the more important points I would like to make today in support of this bill is how place-based funding is leveraged in many ways. We estimate that at a minimum it takes \$175,000 a year supports the collaborative place-based planning effort, that times 7 years = \$1.225 million – this is a great return on investment for the state as our community and watershed council have sought added funding. I also want to mention that we conservatively estimate that our community members and partners have put in over 7,000

volunteer hours as part of this process.

The outcomes to date include:

- A completed groundwater plan for Harney County.
- Helped to initiate programs to improve irrigation technology, reduce irrigation acreage, and assist domestic well owners that have been affected by groundwater level declines.
- The collaborative has cooperated with Harney County Court in the exploration of alternative ways to provide domestic water including a community well in the Crane community.
- Identified strategies to implement over time to reduce the rate of use of stored groundwater.
- A study commissioned by OWRD has found that Groundwater discharge in the lowlands of the Harney Basin exceeds recharge by an estimated 110,000 acre-feet each year (Garcia et al., 2022).
- The collaborative is now working on a Surface Water plan so that we have a fully integrated water plan.

Thank you for considering this vital issue of water for all of Oregon.