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Testimony from Esther Lev, Portland OR in favor of HB 3222.

As a wetland ecologist with more than 40 years of experience in assessment, conservation, and restoration of Oregon wetlands, and one of the founders of the Harney Basin Wetland Collaborative, I strongly support HB3222.

The Harney Basin consists of a rich mosaic of wetlands, wet meadows, and irrigated pasturelands that provide critical migration and breeding habitat for a myriad of North American bird species. Many of the managed wetlands and pastures in the floodplain are also part of the vitally important ranching community that supports the rural economy of Harney County.

The Harney Basin is characterized by extremely high year-to-year weather variation. Surface water arrival times, amounts and duration impact wetland plant community composition, diversity, and phenology and then ultimately both wildlife and agricultural uses and needs. Wildlife managers and agricultural producers are continually adapting their management goals and strategies to this variability.

The unfolding impacts of climate change and annual weather conditions on water availability for wet meadow flood irrigation is of grave concern to private land agricultural producers and public land wildlife managers. The need to address water scarcity and to understand the changing hydrologic regime across these habitats is vital for sustainable resource management for both socioeconomics and for the diverse species of wildlife in the Harney Basin. The need to address water scarcity and the changing hydrologic regime across these sensitive habitats is a paramount concern.

Funding from HB3222 will support developing a clearer understanding of water/vegetation/wildlife relationships and in turn better management practices related to enhancing habitat values, suppressing invasive species, and optimizing agricultural production in concert with a changing climate and water patterns. Ensuring Harney Basin wet meadows are effectively flooded can help regional distribution of migratory waterbirds that face declining wetland habitats in other parts of the SONEC flyway.