

**Testimony to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural
Resources and Water
On HB 3231**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

The Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 3231. This bill would fund and direct the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), in consultation with other state agencies, to address regulatory barriers and develop technical assistance resource to support new and expanded beneficial reuse/recycling and land application of reclaimed wastewater in Oregon.

Across the state, Oregonians face complex water challenges. Aging water infrastructure is failing in many communities; in others, the infrastructure is simply inadequate for meeting the needs of a growing population. Changing precipitation patterns and land-use pressures further exacerbate existing water challenges. Water is increasingly scarce, more polluted, less seasonally reliable -- and the future seems to hold more of the same.

We need new approaches to respond to the water challenges that have been building for decades.

Incorporating nature into water management can address these challenges head-on while also supporting prosperous communities and healthy ecosystems. With their direct and associated co-benefits, natural infrastructure approaches will be a crucial component of Oregon's water future – indeed, they must be.

Natural infrastructure can be described as the strategic use of natural lands, such as forests, rivers and wetlands, and working lands, such as farms and ranches, to meet infrastructure needs. Expanding our use of natural infrastructure can build on the many economic, social, and ecological benefits that natural systems provide and can play a critical role of our water management system. Natural infrastructure provides a variety of benefits, depending on the specifics of the project – everything from water quality and habitat enhancement, water storage, pollution reduction, flood reduction, flow augmentation and wildfire risk reduction to opportunities for improving mental and physical health. Treated municipal wastewater, when viewed as a potential resource, can be used to support or expand natural and working lands.

In a 2021 co-authored report entitled “Natural Infrastructure in Oregon: Common Challenges, Opportunities for Action, and Case Studies,” OEC evaluated the benefits and co-benefits of natural infrastructure solutions for municipal wastewater utilities, such as the reuse of treated wastewater to develop or sustain wetlands as an alternative to constructing grey infrastructure such as cooling towers. The report also identified the barriers local communities experience in their efforts to implement these types of projects.

HB 3231 would require and provide the necessary funding to DEQ and the Water Resources Department to take a fresh look at their regulatory framework with the objective of making the process for evaluating, planning, permitting, and funding reuse and beneficial land application projects more tenable. HB3231 also calls for the development of outreach and technical assistance resources, which are especially important to support smaller communities with limited organizational capacity.

OEC's priority is to ensure Oregonians live healthier lives because our air, water and land are cleaner; our food is more sustainably produced; and the products, energy and transportation we rely on are safer for our environment. Oregon must tap all the tools we have in the tool kit to move toward a more sustainable water future for all Oregonians. Expanded water reuse/recycling applications in Oregon can and should be one of those tools. Therefore, OEC urges support for HB 3231.