

Submitter: Erin O Connell

On Behalf  
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and  
Water

Measure: HB3163

Committee members,

I am writing in support of HB 3163 and its intended purpose of creating a dedicated fund to facilitate place-based community centered water planning work. I have worked in Environmental Services and Land Use Development for 15 years at the county level and am the primary staff person that works on water planning efforts. This includes ground/surface water, water quality, water quantity, monitoring and concerns/issues/opportunities that affect the community I serve. It is important to state that Columbia County does not have a dedicated resource person that does this type of work and these duties are not my primary role, but the need is so important that I prioritize water planning where I can. I regularly work to collaborate with other agencies and have developed strong partnerships (regulatory and non-regulatory) where we are all faced with the reality of how we accomplish the work needed with the limited resources we have. Often times we are not able to solve problems in an effective way and HB 3163 could make a real difference and is a solution. Governments are tasked with implementing many mandates and providing many services and the general fund dollars come no where close to covering all of the needs. Water as a basic need for life should not have to compete with all of the other "to-dos" and a shift to making this a priority is past due. Water is also not one size fits all which is why supporting place-based efforts is critical to building off local knowledge to target specific needs and obtain specific outcomes.

As a smaller jurisdiction where agency staff often wear many hats, numerous past efforts have not been sustainable due to a lack of dedicated funding resources to accomplish the work that we as boots on the ground see a desperate need for. Past efforts when working on water related activities ultimately end up stalling because moving processes forward in a comprehensive way requires capacity that just isn't available; this has happened time and time again. Through collaborative efforts we see many areas that we could work on and actually be proactive and solve real problems, but to constantly hit the wall of no dollars to produce results can be frustrating. Oregon state as a whole needs to invest in these efforts. When I first started in this work there was acknowledgement at that time from the Water Resources Department that the state needed a comprehensive inventory and water planning effort; 15 years has passed and no real gains have been made in this area at our local level. From the meetings I am at, I know we are not the only community experiencing this reality. Collaboration, engagement, basic staffing, gathering and utilizing data are all things that we need to be able to implement to appropriately

develop the information needed to make good policy decisions. I often find that we are not able to overcome long standing barriers and solve problems related to water because we cannot get the ongoing traction needed to bring things from beginning to end. This has gotten to a point where sometimes we are hesitant to approach or work on a problem because we know we won't be able to sustain the effort- we should expect more than this.

Water as a resource is a basic need, but it is not renewable or endless. Decisions we make now, or lack thereof, can have consequences that impact communities long into the future. As a government employee, I want to be able to get ahead of a problem, or at least keep up with it, as I think that is what our citizens expect of us. It is what I expect. Many of us recognize real problems around water that we could find solutions to and create a foundation to make better decisions if we had the ongoing financial investment. Let's work to address water related issues before they become something we can't solve or before the hole becomes so deep we can't get out of it. Thank you for your time and for considering this challenge that affects all Oregonian