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March 9, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE Salem Oregon 97301

Re: HB 3231 – Support

Chair Helm, Vice Chair Hartman, Vice Chair Owens, and members of the committee,

Verde is a community-based organization whose mission is to build environmental wealth through organizing, advocacy and social enterprise. We support HB 3231.

HB 3231 will help to expand important work around wastewater reuse and recycling, an issue that is important for water conservation, and community and environmental health and benefits. The bill is designed to help understand and employ best practices to this end. As droughts and water scarcity worsen across the state, creative strategies are needed to ensure that more water is available for fragile ecosystems and beneficial use. But too many confusing barriers and a lack of needed resources prevent many communities from maximizing the benefits from water reuse and recycling.

Verde has also heard from communities that it is not well understood what is allowable or not with regard to water reuse and recycling, how it functions best, and how also to ensure that it does not interfere with water availability for in-stream water rights. HB 3231 will set the stage to identify and implement changes that will improve clarity (no pun intended), as well as provide the needed education and technical assistance that will help communities understand and implement their options.

In particular, by engaging both the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the Water Resources Department (WRD), as well as other interested agencies and entities, HB 3231 ensures that the right voices will be consulted to ensure this work is done right and that the impacts of water reuse and recycling on water availability can be well understood, managed, and communicated. In this vein, Verde would recommend that DEQ and WRD engage smaller rural, remote, and coastal communities at key points in the process and to design technical assistance with those communities in mind as they stand most to benefit from new water reuse and recycling tools, and often feel the worst burdens of drought and the biggest need for water security. They also have the least capacity to implement without sufficient support.

Water reuse and recycling is very much in line with the regenerative principles of environmental justice, which is why so many of the communities Verde works with across Oregon are supportive and in need of this work. Creative reuse and recycling is common in many lower income homes, where families help everyday items go farther in ways that both help their family budgets and cut down on waste that has environmental impacts. These same families see and demonstrate the value in taking these same principles to broader scales across their communities. They are also some of the families who will benefit most from that work, especially with regard to water. And with that in mind, Verde urges the committee to support HB 3231.

Respectfully,

Oriana Magnera
Energy, Climate, and Transportation Manager, Verde