

March 23, 2023

Letter in Support of HB 2929

Oregon House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

Greetings Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Hartman and Owens, and Committee Members Boice, Gamba, Levy, Marsh, McLain, and Scharf:

I write as an exempt well owner for my residence and also as an agricultural surface water rights holder farming in rural Deschutes County.

Drought is not the only reason for supporting HB 2929. OWRD needs tools such as the proposed injunctive relief to swiftly bring bad actors into compliance with water law. HB 2929 gives OWRD better oversight to water theft and will reign in misuse of water.

Oregon's most precious asset is our public waters; yet many knowingly violate our water laws and their actions are becoming more extroverted and brazen with drought further exacerbating the situation.

Many exempt well owners are using their water for commercial purposes without a water right; many exempt well owners are using their exempt well water for nursery use; increasingly exempt wells are used to fill larger and larger 'aesthetic' ponds without having a water right, or a reservoir permit or meeting Deschutes Groundwater mitigation obligations. Today 100% of Deschutes County is in Drought D1; 52.74% of Deschutes County is in Severe Drought D2; 21.18% of Deschutes County is in Exceptional Drought D3. Crook County to our East is in even more dire circumstances. Across Oregon 73.3% is Abnormally Dry D0. And NOAA's predictions are grim. Change is what Climate Change means so I'm glad to write in support of the proposed HB 2929 changes you are making to give the support to OWRD that it needs.

The Deschutes Basin is in a full water grab in case you haven't heard. Additionally, NOAA's predictions for this year are dismal. OWRD needs the best water stewardship tools at its disposal now.

Many agricultural water rights holders are cutting locks on head gates or are blocking canals to further raise ditch water levels at their intakes to increase their water use above the allotted amount: this is happening with increased frequency especially when irrigation allotments are being curtailed to meet state law.

Many agricultural water rights holders are using their irrigation district agricultural water rights for nursery uses when this is not permitted.

Please support HB 2929 as introduced.

Please consider requiring meters on all wells that have water rights including exempt wells that have water rights transferred to the exempt well: it's high time that local water masters and the state of Oregon require water meters.

Thank you,
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