



DESCHUTES RIVER  
CONSERVANCY

April 2, 2023

**TO:** House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
**FROM:** Kate Fitzpatrick, Executive Director, Deschutes River Conservancy  
**RE:** Support for HB 3124

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Owens and Hartman, and Members of the Committee:

The Deschutes River Conservancy (DRC) was formed in 1996 by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, irrigation, and environmental interests. The DRC's mission is to restore streamflow and water quality in the Deschutes Basin using collaborative approaches that support the diverse uses of water in the basin. Our board of directors includes irrigation, environmental, and tribal interests, along with federal, state, and local agencies, and operates by consensus. The DRC and its partners have restored significant flows to our basin's rivers while supporting out of stream community uses of water.

The DRC would like to commend the co-chairs of the committee in bringing forward a comprehensive water investment package at a time when increased investment in water is critical for the future of all Oregonians. The DRC supports many components of this package. At the statewide level, we lend overarching support for the investments in the agency capacity and data generation necessary to support sound water management. We also enthusiastically support investments in fish passage (5-1); watershed resiliency (5-4); and continued investment in OWEB and OWRD grant programs (5-3 and 6-5).

As the DRC is heavily engaged in solving water management problems in the Deschutes Basin, we would like to specifically call out strong support for several elements critical for success in the Deschutes Basin.

These include:

- 1-4, related to **increased tribal engagement in water**. The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are water management and planning leaders in the Deschutes. Their ability to continue to fully engage is critical to basin success.
- 1-10, **Development of a Deschutes Basin Integrated Water Plan**. The Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative is midway through plan development, in line with the State's Place-Based Planning Guidelines and the Integrated Water Resources Strategy. The Collaborative needs continued investment to ensure this plan gets completed and implemented.
- 5-8, **Studying springs in the Deschutes Basin**. Additional information on springs and cold water refugia is important for ongoing discussions and decision-making around conjunctive surface and groundwater management actions in the Deschutes.
- 5-9, **Deschutes Drought Resiliency and Watershed Restoration**. Integrating water marketing, increased water measurement, on-farm efficiency upgrades, and habitat

restoration is the most effective way to complement large-scale canal piping to meet the critical flow and watershed needs in the Deschutes. This investment ensures that we accelerate this work at a critical time.

- **6-1, Irrigation Modernization Match for Federal Funds.** Match funds are critical for continued large-scale conservation projects in the Deschutes that are restoring significant flows to the basin. We recommend that “Irrigation Modernization” project implementation funding only be available to applicants that use the Allocation of Conserved Water Program (or equivalent protections) to legally protect a portion of the conserved water, ensuring public benefit for public funds.

Partners in the Deschutes are collaborating intensively to scale up the pace and scale of water management projects to ensure we can restore our ecosystems and sustain agricultural and community water needs. These efforts are broadly supported and cross partisan divides. They meet instream and out of stream needs. They demonstrate the strength of the Deschutes Basin’s community approach. But this work needs to accelerate in the context of continued drought, critical species and ecosystem needs, and risks to agriculture. The combination of investments bulleted above ensures that the Deschutes Basin can do this.

Thank you for providing an opportunity to provide input. A bold investment in water at this time will help ensure that Oregon remains a livable, desirable, and sustainable place into the future.

Sincerely,



Kate Fitzpatrick  
Executive Director