



3500 GRAVES RD – HOOD RIVER, OR 97031 | PH: (541) 354 – 1185 | P.O. BOX 162 – ODELL, OR 97044

April 4, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Chair Ken Helm,
Vice-Chair Mark Owens,
Vice-Chair Annessa Hartman,
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package

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

I am writing on behalf of East Fork Irrigation District to express strong support for House Bill 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package proposed by Representative Helm and Representative Owens. I particularly want to highlight the importance of provisions that provide match funding for irrigation districts to unlock federal dollars for irrigation modernization projects and help districts like ours be more resilient to drought and water scarcity.

East Fork Irrigation District is located along the east slope of the Cascade Mountain Range in the Columbia River Basin. Founded in 1914, it is the largest of five irrigation districts in Hood River County. EFID covers 15,150 acres and delivers water to approximately 1255 patrons irrigating 9600 acres. EFID is a leading fruit-growing area in Oregon, producing one-third of the United States winter pear crop. The primary crops grown in the district are pears, apples, and cherries. Much of the infrastructure that the district relies on is over 90 years old, inefficient, and increasingly expensive to operate and maintain annually. The modernization projects that the district is pursuing will allow for increased water efficiency, improved water quality, enhanced stream flows, more reliable water deliveries to patrons, and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Oregon has faced several years of severe droughts, including some of the worst on record, and the detrimental impacts are being felt throughout the state, including in our region. Without access to reliable water deliveries, farmers are unable to grow crops and produce the food and fiber that we all rely on. This not only affects our economy, but also our food security and, especially in rural communities, our way of life. Drought has impacted our basin by limiting the water season during harvest season, and low stream flows decreasing our ability to divert from the river to protect fish habitat.

To implement large-scale, multi-benefit projects to modernize irrigation infrastructure and be more resilient to drought, many districts, including ours, have utilized federal programs such as NRCS's Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations or Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART for support.

These programs play a key role in planning, designing, and implementing projects, but still require some portion of project funding to come from non-federal sources. Our district is committed to modernizing our system, but we require state funding to meet match requirements for implementing identified projects in 2023-2025 and beyond. Bill 3124 contains the match funding districts need to fully utilize and leverage the infrastructure dollars that the federal government has made available.

I urge you to support the important funding components in HB 3124 and ensure that state match funding for irrigation modernization projects remains a part of the final bill. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Steve Pappas
District Manager