

TALENT IRRIGATION DISTRICT

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April 3, 2023

1916-2016

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 Talent 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.

Talent Irrigation District is located in the beautiful Rogue Valley and has been in operation since May 22, 1916. The project area includes land in and around the cities of Medford, Phoenix, Talent, and Ashland. We have 3,500 accounts and 3,000 land owners that we provide irrigation water to for a total of 16,300 acres of land. The crops grown include, but are not limited to, pears, apples, grapes, hay, etc. Most of the infrastructure that the district relies on is over 60 years old, inefficient, and increasingly expensive to annually operate and maintain. The modernization projects that the district is pursuing will allow for increased water efficiency, improved water quality, enhanced streamflows, and more reliable water deliveries to patrons.

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. Crops in the district have not been able to be harvested in the past couple of years due to the lack of water. In fact, the perennial crop's objective has just been trying to keep their fruit trees, vines, grasses, etc., alive. The economic impact of losing hundreds of acres of these crops would be devastating to the economy of the Rogue Valley now and for future generations.

In order 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,


Wanda Derry
Manager