

TUMALO IRRIGATION DISTRICT

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 Tumalo 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.

Tumalo Irrigation District (TID) is located in Bend, Oregon. TID serves over 690 patrons, manages more than 80 miles of pipes and open canals, and delivers irrigation water to more than 7,400 acres of land that grows a variety of crops such as hay, alfalfa, garlic, lavender and other crops. The canals are over 100 years old and are lined with porous volcanic soils and fractured basalt rock. While the canals were credited with the development and expansion of irrigated agriculture in the region, the method of construction resulted in about half of the water withdrawn to be lost due to seepage in the canals. Tumalo Irrigation District over the last several years has been working to modernize its system through investments on the State and Federal level that have directly resulted in permanently protected water rights instream that benefit the Middle Deschutes River, and for the benefit of the Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan. Other benefits that have directly helped TID patrons include access to increased water efficiency, improved water quality, and more reliable water deliveries.

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, especially in rural communities. Over the last 3 years Tumalo Irrigation District patrons have experienced water shortages that include having to fallow lands, District wide rotations of water, and shortened growing seasons.

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 a 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.

TUMALO IRRIGATION DISTRICT

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,



Chris Schull

District Manager/Secretary to the Board

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