



March 31, 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 the Santiam Water Control 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.

The Santiam Water Control District is located in Stayton Oregon, and we have been managing water delivery to 17,400 acres in the Willamette Valley since 1909. We serve over 540 Patrons growing everything from food crops to grass seed with the water diverted from the Santiam River and the Detroit Reservoir. Much of the infrastructure that the district relies on is over 70 years old, inefficient, and increasingly expensive to operate and maintain. The modernization project that the district is pursuing will allow the District to improve the existing irrigation system to enhance its sustainability, reliability, and efficiency. The project aims to address operational inefficiencies, improve water management, and water quality, enhance streamflows and help to promote sustainable practices that will benefit farmers, the agricultural industry, and the environment.

Our existing irrigation system is outdated and inefficient, resulting in water loss, reduced crop yields, and increased costs for farmers. Additionally, there are concerns about meeting future regulatory compliance requirements related to water quality and ecological needs, which may result in escalating costs for the irrigation district and its patrons. To address these concerns, there is a need for action to modernize the irrigation district infrastructure. The farmers located within the District rely on us to provide the water that they need to grow their crops. With the drought as it has been, this modernization project will let us conserve lost water and more efficiently deliver it, all while reducing the impacts to our environment.

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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 Water SMART 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,

Brent Stevenson

Brent Stevenson
District Manager
Santiam Water Control District

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