



April 3, 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 Ochocho 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.

Ochocho Irrigation District (OID) was established in 1916 and has been in operation for more than 107 years. OID serves nearly 900 patrons and delivers water to over 20,000 acres of land in Crook County. The past three years of exceptional drought have been extremely challenging. OID has been able to effectively serve the irrigation needs of our patrons but not without significant cost. Impacts of the ongoing drought are numerous but some of the more obvious include:

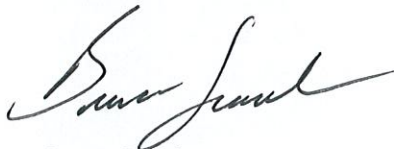
- Record low storage in reservoirs. January 2022 set a record low storage level for Prineville Reservoir at around 27,000 acre feet. 2023 has set a new record low of under 16,000 acre feet.
- Farmers are having to fallow fields (up to 50% in some cases), deficit irrigating resulting in lower yields and converting to crops that are drought resistant but are less profitable.
- Low canals causing difficulties with reliable water delivery and efficiency
- Slow moving canals with low water and high temperature leading to increased growth of aquatic weeds/moss/algae resulting in more aquatic herbicide application and labor for mechanical removal increasing operating costs.
- Increased labor costs for patrons to move irrigation more frequently to get across fields and rotating between properties
- Increased pump costs to irrigate longer with less water

In 2023, OID and Crook County continue to suffer from historic and prolonged drought. Governor Kotek issued a drought emergency for Crook County on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. This is the fourth year in a row that Crook County has been declared a drought emergency. According to the latest US Drought Monitor, Crook County continues to be characterized as the most severe form of drought (D4 – Exceptional Drought). We now hold the unfortunate distinction of being the only area in the entire Western United States with this “Exceptional Drought” characterization.

Despite these challenges OID and its partners continue to work to implement The Ochoco Irrigation District Infrastructure Modernization Project. The project will restore natural flow to the middle reach of McKay Creek by allowing irrigators from river mile 6 to 12 to trade their McKay Creek water rights for Ochoco Irrigation District water rights, sourced from Prineville Reservoir. In exchange for more reliable OID water, landowners will transfer their certificated McKay Creek water rights in stream. The project will permanently restore up to 11.2 cfs of streamflow in McKay Creek for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and other aquatic resources. New pump stations necessary for delivering this water will replace aged infrastructure in OID, reducing O & M costs, improving efficiency and water delivery reliability. 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 OID needs 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Scanlon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bruce Scanlon  
Manager

*It is OID's mission to effectively and efficiently serve the current and future irrigation needs of our patrons by economically operating and maintaining the districts resources with honesty and integrity.*