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House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Testimony on HB 2813 -1 Amendment

Submitted by: Zach Freed, Sustainable Water Program Director

Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, and Members of the Committee:

The Nature Conservancy appreciates the importance and value of a statewide program to incentivize the voluntary cancellation of groundwater rights as described in the -1 amendment to HB 2813. We believe the amendment would be improved with a narrow change to ensure that incentives are only offered in areas where new groundwater rights are no longer being allocated, such as Critical Groundwater Areas that prohibit new ground water permits and any other groundwater restricted or management areas that prohibit new groundwater permits.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every community around the state, where we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

The Harney Basin Groundwater Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) serves as a valuable voluntary pathway to reduce pressure on an over-allocated aquifer. One of the reasons the Harney Basin CREP is likely to be effective is that voluntary cancellations are permanent and new groundwater rights are no longer being allocated in the basin, meaning that the public funding results in permanent benefit to the aquifer.

We suggest adding a provision to HB2813 -1 to ensure similar benefits to areas that may enroll in future CREPs. We recommend changing Section 2(2) to the following (additions in **red**):

(2) All moneys in the fund are continuously appropriated to the Water Resources Department to provide the state contribution for water users who cancel ground water rights as part of enrollment in the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (16 U.S.C. 3831) **in ground water management areas that are closed to further appropriation of ground water.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.