



Via Electronic Submission to Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife

Senator Jeff Golden, Chair
Senator Todd Nash, Vice-Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources
State Capital
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Opposition to SB 747 (Time to Invest in Solutions)

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash and Members of the Committee:

The Northeast Oregon Water Association (NOWA) would like to thank the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife for your interest in groundwater quality and quantity. NOWA is opposed to SB 747. NOWA is hopeful that meaningful investments in memorializing a peer reviewed data set for the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA) can remain a priority of the State of Oregon and that we can work this session to prioritize investments in meaningful data sets and solutions over divisive bills, such as SB 747.

About NOWA

The Northeast Oregon Water Association (NOWA) is a result based non-profit support organization to the natural resource-based economy of the Mid-Columbia region of Northeast Oregon. We represent solutions not special interests or industries for the benefit of all needs in our region. Our organization includes landowners of over 350,000 acres of the most highly productive, irrigated food producing farmland in the world, as well as the counties, cities, ports, special districts, and private businesses that generate and support our value-added agricultural output that now contributes not only food but over \$2 billion annually to the region and State of Oregon. A sustainable, drought & climate-change resilient, conjunctively managed water supply program is critical to sustainability of our region and the quality of life of all our current and future generations.

NOWA is involved in water quality matters when/if water quality and quantity intersect. As it relates to groundwater recovery, many of the efforts NOWA has focused on directly and/or indirectly benefit or link to water quality considerations. These efforts include saving potable basalt groundwater for drought needs and potable needs of the region, aquifer recharge & aquifer storage and recovery testing to improve groundwater quantity and quality conditions and groundwater data accountability to better understand the different aquifers of the region and sustainability issues impacting each aquifer. NOWA has been a staunch supporter of data accountability and development of a cross coordinated, peer reviewed data set to help guide current and future decisions regarding groundwater sustainability.



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SB 747 was not developed or forwarded by the LUBGWMA Committee

Multiple organizations, academic professionals, state agencies and local government officials have been involved in a significant number of meetings to assess previous actions and action plans of the LUBGWMA Committee as well as establish a formal process and list of steps in moving efforts forward to both protect current public health concerns in the various aquifers and plume areas of the LUBGWMA. The Committee has accepted the arduous task of both looking in the mirror and attempting to look forward at the same time. While the task is daunting, the effort is consistent with past efforts in the Umatilla Basin that focused on collaboration over litigation and that focused on what is needed, both in data and in action, to solve legacy problems and attempt to prevent re-occurrence of the problem for future generations. We believe that the efforts and recommendations of the LUBGWMA Committee need the time and investment necessary to establish a solid foundational footing and build trust in the process that will hopefully lead to a list of clear recommendations for data, funding and remediation activities. These efforts are all necessary and all need to be coordinated together to continue to protect public health while also treating the various plumes in the various aquifers of the LUBGWMA. We encourage the Oregon Legislature to avoid pre-emptive and/or divisive legislation such as SB 747 that could upend the on-going trust building and data vetting of the various agencies. We encourage everyone to focus efforts instead on what is needed to allow the LUBGWMA Committee to keep working, keep building trust and keep up with the regional commitment of collaborative problem solving.

SB 747 Distracts from and Competes with Data Compilation and Vetting Efforts Already in Motion

Groundwater data in Oregon is the wild west with no clear accountability mechanisms on how it is to be generated, reviewed, catalogued, used or defended for a specific purpose or purposes. The LUBGWMA, and Umatilla Basin as a whole, is proof that decades of data generation, at significant cost to both public and private resource streams, means nothing if that data is not developed and peer reviewed for accountability within an established plan and set of measurables & deliverables. The Umatilla Basin groundwater system is probably the most studied Basin in the State of Oregon and little to no firm long-term direction on solutions have ever been memorialized because of any of the data generated to date. Developing accountability mechanisms is expensive and time consuming when attempted to be completed when an issue first develops. It is even more difficult, expensive and time consuming once entrenched opinions form and are defended around conclusions of individualized data sets, such as is the case with the LUBGWMA.

The need for data accountability mechanisms, peer reviewed data sets or other mechanisms that can build trust in data have been highlighted multiple times by the LUBGWMA Committee(s), and local governments & results-based organizations such as NOWA.

SB 747 would further distract from efforts to look at the data in the LUBGWMA holistically by focusing significant resources and limited state funding on even more arbitrary and data of questionable value to the solution(s).

Additionally, SB 747 places a significant burden on ODA and onto an arbitrary land class (ownership interests over 200 acres) and completely discounts and/or ignores all of the other classes and land uses that the LUBGWMA Committee has identified as possible contributors to nitrate contamination regardless of their proximity to drinking water wells.

Time to Invest Money and Human Resources in Meaningful Solutions Not Questionable Data Sets

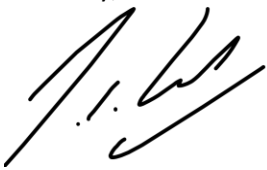
SB 747 is yet another bill and another effort that distracts from the reality that solutions to both current drinking water needs, and remediation of plumes that formed 50 years ago, exist today.

NOWA has worked tirelessly since inception in 2012 on solutions to groundwater issues that have plagued the region since the 1970's and 1980's. We commend the state agencies, local governments and private businesses for their work to ensure that clean water is currently available to all residents potentially at risk while data and solutions are worked

out. We also commend many of our members for coming together for many years to offer solutions rather than point fingers. Solutions such as aquifer dialysis (groundwater remediation), aquifer recharge, saving and re-allocating potable basalt groundwater to potable needs in exchange for mitigated Columbia River water, community water systems, community sewer systems, etc. all backed up by a peer reviewed data set that all agencies and locals are working under can solve many, if not all, of the legacy issues we have all inherited.

NOWA encourages the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildlife to vote no on SB 747 and focus the limited resources we have on collaborative/measurable outcomes in the LUBGWMA including completion of a peer reviewed data set, efforts to connect high-density rural residential areas to regulated drinking water systems and remediation projects that can be implemented to clean up all or portions of the LUBGWMA over time. We, again, appreciate your interest in groundwater quality and quantity and look forward to working with the Committee in the future as LUBGWMA discussions and proposals are vetted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.R. Cook', with a stylized flourish at the end.

J.R. Cook

Director