

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire On SB 747

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance equitable, innovative and collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council opposes SB 747.

Senate Bill 747 requires every landowner in the state with more than 200 acres of irrigated agricultural land to register and annually report fertilizer use to Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA). The stated goal of this proposed program is to allow Oregon Department of Agriculture “identify persons who are overapplying fertilizer” and impose civil penalties for violation.

The premise of this bill shows a lack of understanding about the basics of agricultural production. There is no “one size fits all” approach to responsible fertilizer application and nutrient management, even when considered for a particular crop. Rather, fertilizer application rates and timing of applications vary growing season to growing season across the state, based on a range of factors including crop type and variety, soil type, crop rotation, and weather. The reporting requirements specified by SB 747 would flood ODA with essentially useless data, given that there is little agronomic context for evaluating the data being reported.

Additionally, the bill specifies that only irrigated agricultural operations above 200 acres would be required to report. After 18 years working on water quality in Oregon, and seven years working in sustainable agricultural production management, I can assure you that there is no magic cut-off point below which there is no mismanagement of fertilizer applications.

Finally, the agency has no program set up to deal with the flood of information SB 747 would unleash. The fiscal for developing and implementing any sort of data collection and management for SB 747 would be enormous.

The agency (ODA), the producer community, rural land managers, conservation and environmental organizations, and trained agronomists (including experts from OSU with geographically specific knowledge) should have been consulted in the development of this bill. Failure to do so has resulted in a bill that, while well-intended, will not achieve its intent of reducing mismanagement of fertilizer applications and consequent contamination of groundwater.

OEC urges you to reject SB 747.