



WaterWatch of Oregon

Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

SB 761, -1 Amendments

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon

by Kimberley Priestley

Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs
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Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and aquifers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's waters. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch supports the SB 761 -1 amendments

Like many basins in Oregon, the Walla Walla river is over-allocated most months of the year, meaning more water rights have been given away than nature can fulfill. As a result, the system lacks adequate instream flow to meet the needs of fish and wildlife, including two species of fish listed as threatened under the Federal Endangered Species Act. In recent years, interests in the basin have been working together to try to improve instream flows.

While the -1 amendments have not yet been posted, our understanding is that they set up a pilot project to allow irrigation districts in the Walla Walla basin to transfer, on a split rate basis, irrigation water instream. This tool would allow farmers to continue farming, while at the same time dedicating conserved water instream to be protected for fish and wildlife. It is our understanding that the -1 amendments would protect other water rights against injury and provide legal protection for the water restored instream. It is also our understanding that the instream water is intended to be shepherded through Washington and cannot be used as mitigation.

WaterWatch supports the -1 amendments to allow this new tool to help restore flows in the Walla Walla basin. However, our support of the -1 amendments is limited to the narrow scope of instream leases/transfers only. We would not support the expansion of this concept beyond instream.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

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