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**March 10, 2025**

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

**Subject: Testimony in Opposition to HB 3501**

Chair Helm, Chair Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the Committee:

Willamette Riverkeeper strongly opposes HB 3501 as the bill would prohibit the state from considering impairment to public interest values when evaluating water rights transfers. Willamette Riverkeeper is a 501(c)3 nonprofit that works to restore and protect the Willamette River and its tributaries.

Currently under Oregon water law, applications for new water rights must demonstrate that the public interest will not be impaired, but water rights transfers (existing water rights) can be changed without any consideration of the harm that may be caused to the public interest, including environmental harms. Oregon water law is silent on the need to consider the public interest during water rights transfer, a loophole that hinders Oregon's ability to protect instream values. Currently, water rights transfers only have to consider whether other water rights would be impacted by the change. HB 3501 takes it a step further and outright bans the overall impact these transfers may have by stating: "whether the proposed changes as described by the application would impair or be detrimental to the public interest may not be considered."

In Oregon, all sources of water belong to the public. To expressly prohibit the consideration of harm to these waters will have a major negative effect on Oregon's values and our waterways' beneficial uses, including recreation, aesthetics, and aquatic life.

HB 3501 is explicitly anti-public interest and goes against what is best for all Oregonians under the guise of making the water rights transfer process more efficient. If the only way to speed up a process is to force the public's interest out of the conservation, that is not a solution. HB 3501 would move Oregon backwards and completely ignore the values of Oregonians and harm the places and creatures that make Oregon so special.

Willamette Riverkeeper urges you to not advance HB 3362. Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

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