

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
From: Deborah Ferrer, The Dalles
Re: IN OPPOSITION TO HB 3501
Date: March 11, 2025

Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

As a landowner in Wasco County, I write to you in OPPOSITION to HB 3501. Water rights laws in Oregon are extremely antiquated, dating to a time before we understood the science of hydrology and the value of water beyond its use in for-profit agriculture. This bill reflects those antiquated views.

Some of my best childhood memories are from playing along or in Mill Creek on my parents' property 10 miles southwest of The Dalles. Later, as a teen, a quiet place on the bridge above the creek was a welcome sanctuary from my siblings. Later still, when my husband and I were just beginning our own family, we were fortunate to be able to buy a property along that same Mill Creek, where we have now lived for the past 35 years. Our stretch of Mill Creek has provided our family, our neighbors, and our friends with all kinds of important benefits: recreation, sanctuary, wildlife, protection from floods, and even education as high school students conducted research on resident and migrating fish populations. All our neighbors love watching the faithful bald eagle pair that has reared a couple dozen offspring over the past decade in a nest above our stream. We feel blessed when we get a peak at the beavers working tirelessly on a new bit of dam each summer and fall, or the river otters that frolic so playfully on the logs and in the water. And at certain times of the year, we all trek down to the bank to watch hundreds of salmon spawning in one spot or another.

What's the point of this? Water in our streams has much more value than just extraction for irrigation. This bill negates all those other values. Not only should you let this bill die a quiet death in committee, but it's long past time to relegate our century-old water rights laws to the dustbin of history and replace them with modern laws based on sound science and recognition of the many diverse benefits a healthy streamflow provides. As we face increasing temperatures and drought from climate change, this is more important than ever.

Respectfully,

Deborah Ferrer, The Dalles