



**Joint Letter of Support for HB 3114
Partnership for Lake Abert and the Chewaucan**

March 19, 2025

Re: Lake Abert and the Chewaucan Water Investment in HB 3114

Dear Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, and members of the House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

We are writing in joint support for HB 3114. HB 3114 supports continued collaboration, information gathering, planning and early project implementation for the Partnership for Lake Abert and the Chewaucan (PLACe). This letter from PLACe members provides additional information about the collaborative and our work together to address long-term water needs in Lake Abert and the Chewaucan River watershed.

In early 2022 news coverage about the drying of Lake Abert catalyzed a series of conversations, meetings, tours and other activities among multiple stakeholders, agencies and elected officials. Tensions were high and conflicts arose as local, regional and national stakeholders engaged with different views and perspectives on the causes, implications, potential solutions and urgency of the changes observed at Lake Abert.

With early support from Oregon Consensus and Oregon State University, several local and regional leaders from the agricultural and conservation communities began discussing the potential for formation of a collaborative group to begin exploring the suite of social, economic, cultural and environmental complexities surrounding the conservation and management of Lake Abert and the greater Chewaucan River watershed. They explored broad questions such as *Who should be included? What is the scope of the conversation? What are the specific goals? What is the timeframe? What are the next steps?*

Working together as an informal collaborative – which ultimately became the formally organized Partnership for Lake Abert and the Chewaucan (PLACe) – organizers approached the Oregon Legislature seeking support for facilitation, fact-finding and partnership development. Early support from the Oregon Water Resources Department helped catalyze early planning and, in 2023, HB 3099 provided important resources and direction to launch the collaborative. HB 3099 established:

...a collaborative process for: (a) Developing a shared understanding of water management in the Chewaucan River watershed; and (b) Identifying broadly supported actions related to the Chewaucan River watershed that will strive to: (A) Meet water needs, including needs for agricultural operations, communities, Lake Abert, wet meadows and fish and wildlife; (B) Address the ecological health of Lake Abert and the

entire Chewaucan River watershed; and (C) Consider social, economic and environmental benefits and impacts.

Since this time, the PLACe, including 15 voting members, 5 Tribes and 65 other participants from agencies, the local community and organizations, has met dozens of times in person and remotely, to develop a:

- Formal charter and membership structure;
- Comprehensive report capturing the shared understanding -- using lived experiences, Tribal ecological knowledge, and western science -- of Lake Abert and the Chewaucan's water resources, agriculture, fish and wildlife habitat, upland processes, cultural heritage, and drought;
- Strategy framework with long and near-term outcomes tied to shared goals;
- New data and information;
- Draft hydrologic model for the watershed;
- List of research and data analysis needs; and
- This funding request for the 2025 legislative session.

With strong partnerships in place, good momentum and several key successes behind us, the PLACe is poised to move into the next phase in which we will develop specific plans, strategies and tactics to achieve our goals of sustaining the local community while providing the water needed to support habitat in Lake Abert, the marsh and other important areas in the Chewaucan River watershed. The PLACe will do this continuing to gather important information, enrolling the expertise of other water management professionals, and then developing collaboratively-supported plans for voluntary actions that will meet the PLACe's community and environmental goals. The request being submitted has been supported by a consensus vote of the PLACe.

Thank you again for this opportunity to support passing HB 3114 and for developing collaborative solutions to the water needs in Lake Abert and the Chewaucan River watershed. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or if you need additional information.

Sincerely,

Tess Baker, Chewaucan Watershed Collaborative
Ryan Houston, Oregon Natural Desert Association
Colleen Withers, Chewaucan Watershed Collaborative
Theo Dreher, Oregon Lakes Association
Ashley Tunstall, Ducks Unlimited
Barry Shullanberger, Lake County Commissioner
Marc Hudson, Oregon Agricultural Trust
Matt Withers, Chewaucan Watershed Collaborative
Justin Ferrell, Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District
Autumn Muir, Lake County Umbrella Watershed Council
Marcelle Shoop, National Audubon Society
Larry O'Neill, Oregon State University and Oregon Climate Service