

Submitter: James Best  
On Behalf Of: Citizens  
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3800

Opposition to House Bill 3800

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to House Bill 3800, which seeks to establish new groundwater management regulations in the Harney Basin. While the conservation and sustainable use of water resources are of critical importance, this bill introduces measures that are overly restrictive, economically damaging, and lacking in scientific justification. Below are the key reasons for my opposition:

#### 1. Economic Impact on Landowners and Agricultural Producers

The proposed restrictions on groundwater use, including the modification of certificated water rights and limitations on new water rights, pose a severe threat to farmers and ranchers who rely on groundwater for irrigation and livestock. Agriculture is the backbone of the Harney Basin's economy, and restricting access to water will result in reduced crop yields, job losses, and economic downturns for rural communities.

#### 2. Regulatory Overreach and Unfair Burden

HB 3800 grants broad authority to the Water Resources Department to impose new rules, including requiring measurement and reporting, denying new applications, and even curtailing previously approved groundwater uses. This level of government intervention not only places an unfair regulatory burden on landowners but also creates uncertainty and limits future agricultural development.

#### 3. Inadequate Consideration of Local Stakeholders

The bill mandates the creation of a groundwater advisory committee; however, it fails to ensure that affected landowners, farmers, and local businesses will have a meaningful role in shaping water policy decisions. Effective water management should involve collaboration with those who have a direct stake in the issue, rather than top-down regulations imposed without sufficient input from local stakeholders.

#### 4. Lack of Scientific Rigor in Policy Implementation

The bill outlines vague objectives for groundwater management without clearly defining the data collection methods, success metrics, or the scientific basis for modifying water allocations. The requirement for an "adaptive ground water management plan" lacks transparency regarding how groundwater use trends will be assessed and how restrictions will be justified based on empirical evidence.

## 5. Property Rights and Legal Concerns

By allowing the modification of existing water rights, HB 3800 raises significant concerns about property rights violations. Farmers and landowners who have relied on legally recognized water rights for generations could see their access curtailed or revoked without proper compensation, setting a dangerous precedent for government overreach.

## Conclusion

While water conservation is a legitimate concern, HB 3800 fails to offer a balanced approach that considers both environmental sustainability and economic viability. A more effective solution would involve voluntary conservation programs, incentives for water-efficient technologies, and collaborative efforts with local stakeholders rather than imposing restrictive mandates that will harm rural communities.

For these reasons, I urge legislators to reject House Bill 3800 and instead pursue alternative policies that protect both groundwater resources and the livelihoods of those who depend on them.

Sincerely,  
James Best