

Submitter: Katie Baltzor
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and
Wildfire
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1153

Testimony in opposition of SB 1153

Chair Golden and members of the committee:

I am a cattle and grass hay producer in Harney County and our livelihood depends on water. SB 1153 only adds to the existing problems with OWRD and their management of water in the state of Oregon. As ranchers, we have seen the extreme temperatures at unexpected times of the year. Under these circumstances we need more flexibility not less. Being able to move water rights around to make the most efficient use of a limited resource is of utmost importance to our operation. Adding the criteria for transfer approval on the effect of in-stream habitat for sensitive, threatened or endangered aquatic species just adds another bureaucratic layer to the process. This bills also may attach certain conditions to a transfer approval, such as; water use measurement reporting, water level reporting and possibly fish screens or passage. All of these conditions take time and would require capital improvements, which would be very costly to the water right holder. Cattle producers already operate on thin profit margins and work seven days a week, while most other occupations work five days a week. They do this simply because the job requires it, but they don't need anything else added to their workload. We are good stewards of the land and want to be able to optimize the limited water we may receive through our water right.

SB 427 and 1153 allow the opportunity for outside interest groups to protest each and every water transfer. Currently, OWRD has 227 protests and contested cases that have not been resolved. Some of these have remained unresolved for decades! This bill would promote costly litigation that the State of Oregon simply doesn't have the staff, time, or funds to manage. The bill also allows tribes to review certain transfer requests, which again, could result in delay of the transfer. Oregon already has standards and conditions for granting a water right or a transfer.

In closing, this bill not only impacts agricultural users, but municipal drinking water rights, as well. I am sure municipalities have grave concerns with this bill, as well. I strongly urge you to oppose this bill!