

March 25, 2025

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Central Oregon LandWatch Testimony on SB 1153 – Support

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1153. Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is an Oregon non-profit, public interest organization of about 950 members. Its offices are located in Bend, Oregon. LandWatch’s mission is to defend and plan for Central Oregon’s livable future, and it has advocated for the preservation of natural resources in Central Oregon for over 30 years.

LandWatch supports SB 1153, a fix designed to protect our rivers and streams.

In the Deschutes Basin, surface water rights were over allocated by 1913. Current water supply assessments for the Upper Deschutes Basin highlight an alarming median annual shortfall of 135,000 acre-feet, which can increase to 350,000 acre-feet in dry years.¹ During all years, our rivers and creeks bear the brunt of the shortages, experiencing significant disruptions in flow and temperature.

With no new surface water to allocate, and significant water scarcity challenges, water right transfers are one of the primary pathways available to address new and existing water demands. In reallocating old water rights to new uses, we must ensure we do not further degrade instream habitat for sensitive, threatened or endangered aquatic species or further impair water quality in systems that are already stressed.

By targeting a specific loophole that currently allows water right transfers to bypass environmental review, SB 1153 is an important step forward in safeguarding the ecological integrity of our waterways in a new water era.

¹ Bureau of Reclamation. 2019. *Upper Deschutes River Basin Study*. Prepared in partnership with Oregon Water Resource Department and Basin Study Work Group.



Additionally, SB 1153 ensures that federally recognized tribes have the opportunity to review water right transfers to assess whether tribal water rights could be impacted or if tribal cultural resources might be harmed. The oldest and most senior water rights in the Deschutes Basin belong to the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. It is vital that tribal-supported processes are put in place to protect against potential injury to these rights, in line with the Tribe's 1855 treaty.

I urge the Committee to support SB 1153.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Austin
Wild Lands & Water Program Director
Central Oregon LandWatch
2843 NW Lolo Dr St. 200
Bend, OR 97703

