

March 27, 2025

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire  
Oregon Legislature

RE: Testimony in Opposition to SB 1153

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

Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's most inclusive agriculture organization, proudly representing over 6,500 family farms and ranches that produce more than 220 agricultural commodities. From hops and hazelnuts to cattle, cranberries, and timber with operations spanning from just a few acres to thousands, our members utilize all farming methods including organic, conventional, regenerative, biotech, and even no-tech. My name is Ryan Krabill, and on behalf of OFB, thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony.

I write today in strong opposition to SB 1153 for multiple reasons. The first is that this proposal begins with a false premise that Oregon's water users—including its farmers and ranchers—do not care about the environment, the future, or more broadly, the greater good. If they did, then this proposal would be unnecessary. Quite frankly, it is a disappointing starting point and continues to feed a false and unhelpful narrative.

SB 1153 is a solution in search of a problem. There are serious challenges that deserve the thoughtful, deliberate attention of the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) and our state's water policy makers, but unlike the 135% water user fee increase found in HB 2803 and a persistent lack of agency accountability, this is not one of them. To pile on redundant administrative layers without any identifiable benefit is wasteful and goes against the principles of good governance.

What we should be talking about and celebrating is how Oregon agriculture has long been a national leader in responsible water stewardship, balancing the needs of food production with the imperative to protect our limited natural resources. Across the state, farmers and ranchers employ advanced irrigation technologies, soil moisture monitoring, and conservation practices that maximize water-use efficiency while minimizing waste. These efforts are rooted in a deep respect for Oregon's unique ecosystems and a commitment to sustaining them for future generations. With limited or even no access to

new water rights, producers have adapted by innovating within existing legal frameworks—often through water transfers and cooperative agreements that allow for flexible, efficient use without harming other users or instream flows. This culture of conservation, paired with strong accountability measures under state law, exemplifies how agriculture can thrive while being a responsible guardian of Oregon’s most precious resource.

SB 1153 would dramatically restrict the flexibility and modern efficiencies that Oregon’s farmers, ranchers, and other innovators rely on to adapt their water use to changing environmental and operational conditions. By imposing new, vague, and expansive standards on water right transfers—including mandatory assessments of potential impacts on aquatic species and water quality in stream reaches not protected by instream water rights—the bill introduces significant uncertainty and legal exposure into what is already a highly regulated process. These new criteria go far beyond existing anti-injury and anti-enlargement standards and are not supported by clear metrics or scientific thresholds, effectively opening nearly every transfer to challenge or delay. Given that water transfers are the only remaining legal mechanism to adjust water use in the absence of new rights, SB 1153 threatens to make this vital tool functionally unworkable, thereby undermining the adaptability and long-term viability of Oregon’s agricultural operations.

Collectively, we need to acknowledge that the existing water rights transfer process already includes a mechanism for public protest. Here is what OWRD offers on the matter:

*To approve a transfer application, the Department must determine that the proposed change will not enlarge the water right and will not injure other water rights. **Members of the public are offered a chance to comment and protest a proposed transfer if they believe the right proposed for transfer will be enlarged or an existing water right would be injured.** The Department, working with the applicant, may attach conditions to an approval order to eliminate enlargement of the right or potential injury to other water rights. If conditional approval will not eliminate injury or enlargement, the application is denied.*<sup>1</sup> (emphasis added)

Beyond the public review process, other Oregon agencies including the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Environmental Quality both have statutory authority to apply for and manage instream water rights to protect fish and wildlife habitat and to influence the water rights transfer process according to water quality criteria, respectively. This topic was addressed in further detail in written testimony detailing the collective concerns of 12 statewide agricultural groups.<sup>2</sup>

The second major area of concern that needs to be addressed is that of the policy development process specific to SB 1153. This is unquestionably a major policy proposal

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Water Resources Department, [Water Rights in Oregon: An Introduction to Oregon’s Water Laws](#) (Salem, OR: OWRD, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/168389>

that, if implemented, will have far-reaching consequences on agricultural business viability in a state that is already one of the most inhospitable places for small businesses—including agricultural businesses—in the country.<sup>3</sup> Entire operations have been built for the wise use of water that can responsibly and flexibly be shifted from one need to another—this is standard operating procedure for the responsible water flexibility practices used by today’s agricultural sector. Simply put, investments in modernized systems that promote the efficient use of water are not optional if a farm wants to stay in business. SB 1153 ignores that reality. Accordingly, the ramifications of this bill will have serious impacts. At a minimum the water user community should have been involved in the policy development of something so consequential, as redundant as it is.

In closing, we urge the committee to elevate the voices of Scio over San Francisco and Nyssa over New York. SB 1153 is not only redundant and unnecessary, but also fundamentally flawed and actively counterproductive. It would undermine proven water management strategies, erode trust in the policymaking process, and jeopardize the viability of family farms and ranches that have long been at the forefront of conservation in Oregon. We urge the Committee to reject this proposal and instead work collaboratively with the agricultural community to craft practical, science-based solutions that protect our water resources while supporting those who steward the land every day. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Ryan J. Krabill  
Oregon Farm Bureau

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2024/07/11/americas-top-states-for-business-full-rankings.html>