



Crook County

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March 27, 2025

Subject: Opposition to Senate Bill 1153

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

As a Crook County Commissioner and an advocate for our local agricultural community, I must express my concerns and strong opposition regarding Senate Bill 1153. This bill, proposing significant modifications to the evaluation process for water rights transfers by the Water Resources Department, poses a direct threat to the efficient and equitable management of water resources, with profound implications for both agricultural and municipal stakeholders across Crook County.

Concerns with SB 1153:

1. **Increased Regulatory Complexity:** SB 1153 introduces mandatory evaluations of potential impacts on in-stream habitats and water quality during water rights transfers. This additional regulatory layer is set to complicate an already robust and effective process, increasing the complexity and potential for delays in approving water rights changes that are vital for responsive water management practices.
2. **Mandated Tribal Reviews:** The bill's stipulation for mandatory tribal reviews on certain water rights transfer applications is a concern. While we value and respect our tribal communities' input, the lack of clear guidelines for integrating these reviews within the current procedural framework could lead to significant administrative delays and complications, affecting all parties involved.
3. **Conditional Transfer Provisions:** The introduction of conditions such as compulsory water use reporting and the installation of fish screening devices could impose considerable financial and operational burdens on water rights holders. These provisions seem to be more punitive rather than supportive of sustainable practices and may disproportionately impact small farmers and ranchers who are already navigating tight operational margins.
4. **Operational Impacts:** The agricultural backbone of Crook County relies heavily on the ability to flexibly manage water rights to adapt to varying seasonal and climatic conditions. SB 1153's proposed changes would severely restrict this flexibility, potentially destabilizing our local economy and the livelihoods of our community members who depend on agricultural production. In recent years, our farmers, ranchers, and hay producers have faced extreme temperatures at unexpected times of the year. During these critical periods, the need for flexibility in water management becomes even more paramount. The ability to efficiently move water rights to where they are most needed is essential for the survival of these operations. SB 1153, with its restrictive measures, would only

exacerbate the challenges faced by our agricultural community during these unpredictable weather events, limiting their ability to make the most efficient use of a limited resource.

Given these points, I strongly urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1153 in its present form and to seek amendments that provide a more balanced approach to water management. Such amendments should aim to protect our environmental resources while also supporting the practical needs of water users throughout Oregon.

Thank you for considering my perspective on this critical issue. I am committed to collaborating on sustainable water management solutions that recognize and address the unique needs and challenges of Oregon's diverse communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Barney", is written over a horizontal line. To the left of the signature, there is a small "X" mark.

Brian Barney
County Commissioner