

HERMISTON IRRIGATION DISTRICT



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Letter of Opposition to Senate Bill 1153

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

We are writing to express our strong opposition to Senate Bill 1153. Hermiston Irrigation District (HID) is in the Umatilla Basin in northeast Oregon and part of the Umatilla Basin Exchange. HID provides agricultural water to nearly 10,000 acres of land. The current water rights transfer process provides HID and its patrons with sufficient flexibility to actively engage in water conservation projects. These ongoing state and federally promoted/funded projects allow us to conserve water, manage and prepare for the effects of climate change, build drought resilience, provide more water certainty for farmers, and improve public safety, all while putting more water in-stream, causing no harm to any other water right, and meeting or exceeding environmental needs.

The proposed legislation is not only unnecessary, but also passage could shut down crucial existing and future conservation projects within our district and statewide. Under current Oregon law, water right changes cannot “enlarge” the right or “result in injury to an existing water right.”

Besides these important conservation projects, HID and its patrons also use the current water rights transfer process to help ensure the beneficial use of water and efficient management of on-farm water use within the district. This would become unduly burdensome and prohibitively expensive, which will produce the opposite of the intended effect by limiting HID’s and its patrons’ ability to more efficiently manage water on-farm.

The proposed new requirements would require extensive OWRD analysis which would dramatically increase the already long delays in transfer processing that can continue for years. OWRD does not have the authority or expertise to evaluate the impacts of water right transactions on aquatic species or water quality.

These new provisions would undoubtedly encourage protests of even simple transfers. Even if such protests are ultimately determined to lack merit, they have the potential to completely halt the transfer process or make the process so time-consuming and expensive that it will be nearly impossible for HID or its patron farmers to use the existing transfer process to increase on-farm efficiency and to provide other environmental benefits.

We can agree that we should be seeking ways to enhance water right flexibility to ensure water users can improve operational efficiencies while protecting existing water rights, including instream water rights. **Hermiston Irrigation District encourages you to vote against Senate Bill 1153.**

Respectfully,


Annette Kirkpatrick
District Manager