

Submitter: Tom Doman  
On Behalf Of: White Sage Land and Cattle  
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural  
Resources, and Water  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3800

Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice Chair McDonald, and members of the committee,

Water is the lifeblood of agriculture, sustaining the food we grow and the cattle we raise. Yet, as we face declining groundwater levels due to overallocation, climate variability, and increased demand, it's clear that we must take steps to protect this precious resource—while ensuring that the solutions we adopt are fair, practical, and rooted in the needs of those directly impacted.

My family's history with water management in Harney County goes back generations. My grandfather was instrumental in the early 1950s in constructing a 12-mile ditch from Chickahominy Reservoir to the South Ranch. In the '70s and '80s, my father carried that legacy forward, irrigating 1,000 acres with wheel lines and hand lines. He was also a well driller, responsible for developing several wells in Harney County to support local agriculture and ensure water access during dry periods.

Today, I irrigate our ranch with modern pivot systems. These advances in technology have made our irrigation practices more efficient, but we are still at the mercy of groundwater availability. Like so many of my neighbors, I have seen firsthand the impact of declining groundwater levels on wells and irrigation systems.

The bill before you, which seeks to address groundwater overallocation in the Harney Basin, is a step in the right direction. By providing resources to replace or deepen wells, improving groundwater monitoring, and implementing adaptive management strategies, it offers a framework to balance the needs of current water users with the imperative to protect our groundwater for future generations.

However, as you consider the specifics of this bill, I urge you to ensure that the voices of those who live and work in the Harney Basin are heard and respected. Water policy is complex, and one-size-fits-all solutions often fall short when applied to diverse landscapes and livelihoods. We need flexibility, fairness, and transparency in any program that affects water rights and irrigation practices.

Thank you again for allowing me to share my family's history and my perspective on this critical issue. I look forward to working with all of you to ensure that we make meaningful progress toward sustainable water management in Oregon and beyond.