



WaterWatch of Oregon Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

HB 3343-4

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon

by Kimberley Priestley

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

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Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and aquifers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's waters. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch supports HB 3343-4: HB 3343-4 advances some modest authorities that would allow the state to call for measurement and reporting at key allocation and reallocation junctures and impose civil penalties for violations. The bill also sets up a Water Measurement Cost Share Revolving Fund program. The provisions of HB 3343-4 are not mandates, but permissive authorities.

Water in Oregon belongs to the public. There are over 90,000 existing water rights in Oregon. These rights place huge demands on Oregon's rivers and aquifers and require a complicated system of enforcement and administration. The Oregon Water Resources Department, by statute, is bound to manage these rights in perpetuity. However, there are gaps in the state's water measurement and reporting toolbox that need updating so the Department can manage water according to their statutory obligations. HB 3343-4 provides some modest advancements that will help fill select gaps, which will benefit farmers, cities and fish.

What gets measured gets managed: Water use measurement is the cornerstone of effective water management and efficient water use. It is a basic, common-sense tool that is necessary to provide good data on water use throughout the state, to help water users stay within their legal limits and use water more efficiently, and to help the state carry out its water management responsibilities.

The importance of water use data has been highlighted in a number of state documents including but not limited to the Oregon Plan, the 2000 Water Resources Commission Water Measurement Strategy, the 2017 Integrated Water Resources Strategy and the Secretary of State Audit of the Oregon Water Resources Department. These documents recognize that water measurement provides a solid foundation for the state to make sound decisions to protect existing water right holders, facilitates planning for future water supplies and may prevent time consuming and costly conflicts in the future.

Summary: Increasing conflicts over water, burgeoning demand for limited water supplies, water transfers, instream flow protection, federal laws, water right adjudications, smart economical farm management – all of these things necessitate better state tools for water use measurement and reporting.

HB 3343-4 provides some modest improvements to the OWRD's water measurement and reporting toolbox. The authorities in this bill are not mandates, but permissive. **We urge the committee to pass HB 3343-4.**

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