

April 8, 2025

Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

Testimony on SB 1154-1: Updating Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 1154, which makes meaningful updates to Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act of 1989. The Nature Conservancy writes to express our support for a longer conversation this session around SB1154-1. We appreciate the Governor's leadership to craft this bill, which will contribute to a brighter future for Oregon's ground and surface water and the people, plants, fish, and wildlife that they sustain.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

Senate Bill 1154-1 attempts to solve three problems that have been plaguing water quality management in Oregon.

1. **Prioritization and early warning of water issues:** rather than waiting until contamination is already decades-old and widespread to implement a Groundwater Management Area, the bill provides an on-ramp of early outreach, monitoring, and assessments in a pre-GWMA designation called a 'Groundwater Quality Concern Area,' which also establishes an interagency task force. These early warning systems will reduce regulatory whiplash on impacted communities, provide time for voluntary changes, allow businesses to plan more effectively, and give more advance notice to agencies that action needs to be taken.
2. **Increases transparency and accountability:** Every two years, the bill requires DEQ and partner agencies to report on the 'Concern Areas' and GWMA's to Ways & Means, and to identify the funding required to achieve certain actions. This will provide additional transparency to legislators and communities.
3. **Clarifies agency roles:** Provides a clear framework for the implementation and rollout of 'Concern Areas', including designating a lead agency to run the interagency task force. Establishing a lead agency for concern areas will help the state engage more effectively with communities and ensure that concern areas are addressed effectively and efficiently.

These aims are important to the future of water in this state, and SB1154-1 would benefit from further discussion and input from stakeholders. The Nature Conservancy recommends moving the bill to Senate Rules to provide more time for refinement this session. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 1154.