

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Rules

re: SB 1153

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance equitable, innovative, and collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and for future generations.

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Bonham and Members of the Committee,

For the record, my name is Karen Lewotsky. I am the Water Program Director & Rural Partnerships Lead for Oregon Environmental Council. OEC supports SB 1153 and urges you to do the same.

We need to plan ahead to protect Oregon's rivers and streams from negative environmental impacts to stream flows from water transfers, including impacts that could affect water quality.

Environmental standards for water transfers are not a novel idea. Other western states already have some sort of a similar process in place for transfers.* As water transfers become an increasingly important part of Oregon's water management system, we need to be sure that those transfers are not damaging to the resource itself or the various benefits in-stream water provides.

SB 1153 is good water management for a number of reasons. Recognizing that a current practice has the potential to contribute to water management difficulties and challenges, and then refining that practice to avoid making things worse is a key component of good water management.

Equally important is that by explicitly including water quality in the evaluation of a transfer request, SB 1153 acknowledges that water quantity and water quality are inextricably intertwined. Oregon has a very siloed approach to water management, one agency for water quantity, one for water quality, one for safe drinking water, etc. The very existence of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy is an acknowledgement of the need for water management to be coordinated despite agency silos.

Others have laid out the basics of the bill, including how it can help protect fish. I want to emphasize how SB 1153 protects water quality.

The science and policy of water quality rely on the maxim "**dilution is the solution to pollution**" for managing various wastewater discharges to water bodies. Reducing streamflow in a given reach can reduce the dilution capacity of that reach, meaning that

permitted discharges may no longer be sufficiently diluted to meet the requirements of discharge permits. This potentially endangers public health due to the increased concentration of pollutants. In addition, it might require facilities to make operational changes to maintain safe discharge levels and retain permit compliance.

To summarize, SB1153 modernizes transfer policies to ensure that changes to water rights don't do further harm to the environment. This aligns with the state's goal of modernizing our water management tools, protecting the resource while providing consistency, transparency and predictability.

OEC appreciates the Committee's interest in this important issue and urges your support of SB 1153.

*Idaho, Montana, Utah, Washington and New Mexico