

**To:** Senate Committee On Rules  
**Date:** June 3, 2025  
**Re:** Support for SB 1153

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am submitting testimony in **strong support** of SB 1153.

SB 1153 is a critical piece of legislation to ensure that Oregon's water management decisions align not only with water rights law but also with ecological stewardship. Too often, water right transfers are assessed narrowly—focused on legal validity or historical use—without sufficiently examining the cumulative or indirect impacts on sensitive aquatic habitats or degraded stream systems.

Specifically, SB 1153 takes two urgently needed steps:

1. It **requires the Water Resources Department (WRD) to assess whether a proposed water right transfer could result in a loss of in-stream habitat** for sensitive, threatened, or endangered aquatic species, even if those stream reaches are not currently protected by existing in-stream rights.
2. It ensures that the WRD also **considers whether a proposed transfer will contribute to water quality impairment** in streams that are already classified as water-quality limited under the Clean Water Act.

Given the increasing pressures of climate change, drought, and declining snowpack on Oregon's rivers and streams, the state cannot afford to treat water right transfers as purely administrative or transactional matters. We need robust environmental reviews that reflect up-to-date scientific understanding of ecological thresholds, particularly for salmon, steelhead, lamprey, native freshwater mussels, and other species under stress.

Moreover, Oregon's commitments under state and federal law—including the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act—obligate us to prevent further habitat degradation and water quality decline. This bill provides a mechanism to ensure our water governance is consistent with those obligations.

Beyond direct habitat loss and water quality impairment, we must also consider the cascading impacts from industrial land use, particularly Oregon's timber and large-scale agricultural sectors. Industrial timber practices have contributed to landscape-level monocultures that are highly flammable, amplifying the frequency and intensity of wildfires. These fires don't just stay confined to timberlands—they increasingly spread to rural homes, communities, and municipal watersheds. The use of chemical fire retardants, often dumped from aircraft or applied in large quantities, then leaches into our streams and rivers, introducing harmful compounds linked to endocrine disruption and declining human fertility.

At the same time, industrial agriculture and timber crops (such as hybrid poplar, alfalfa, or irrigated timber plantations) demand enormous water withdrawals, often depleting streamflows

precisely when endangered fish like salmon and steelhead need cool, oxygenated water for migration and spawning. When these streams run dry or warm beyond survival thresholds, salmon die. And when salmon die, the marine ecosystems that depend on them—particularly orcas—face food shortages, contributing to the ongoing collapse of top ocean predators and the formation of coastal dead zones.

This bill (SB 1153) provides a crucial policy tool to start **breaking this destructive chain**, ensuring that our water governance decisions don't simply rubber-stamp transfers that exacerbate ecological collapse.

We must also honor the sovereign nations and Indigenous communities whose cultural identity, spiritual lifeways, and treaty rights are rooted in salmon-bearing rivers. The Tribes of **Salisha**—whose memory and stewardship extend across generations and across borders—remind us that salmon and orcas are more than a species; they are kin. To lose them is to sever a sacred relationship between people and place.

SB 1153 offers one concrete way Oregon can stop participating in this disconnection. It empowers our institutions to evaluate transfers not just for legality, but for their ecological and moral consequences.

I urge the committee to pass SB 1153 without weakening amendments. It is time to restore balance to our watersheds and to reaffirm our responsibility to the land, to future generations, and to the First Peoples who have always known what it means to live in relation to the water.

Thank you for your attention and your service to the people of Oregon.