

June 3, 2025

Senate Committee on Rules

Testimony on SB 1153 -5 Amendment

Submitted by: Zach Freed, Sustainable Water Program Director

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

The Nature Conservancy **supports the -5 amendment for SB 1153**, which safeguards fish habitat and water quality when non-municipal water right holders seek to transfer water rights.

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 community around the state, where we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

TNC acknowledges the leadership by legislators and the Governor's Office to bring together multiple interests to find a solution that worked. This legislation benefited from substantial time invested in refining the scope and scale to be as efficient as possible while still being effective.

Water right transfers are an important tool for Oregon's water management. However, in some cases they can cause unintended negative consequences to fish through habitat loss and water quality impairment. This bill would prevent that unintended harm without adding more review time to the already-lengthy agency review process.

SB 1153 also incorporates Tribal consultation to better protect the sovereign rights and interests of federally-recognized Tribes in Oregon. This provision is an important step forward for the states to ensure that transfers don't unintentionally impact Tribal interests.

Finally, the bill would allow basin-specific rules to affect transfers, which is important added flexibility to the basin rulemaking process to allow for more rigorous and adaptable basin-by-basin rules.

These updates would help modernize Oregon's water right transfer policy to help us catch up with our western state neighbors. For these reasons, The Nature Conservancy supports SB 1153 with the -5 amendment posted today.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.