

Submitter: Thomas G Cooney MD MACP FRCP

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4006

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, members of the Committee:

I am writing with a sense of urgency to request your opposition to HB 4006. As we are even now experiencing a drought that will pose challenges this year and in the future, it is more important than ever that we manage our water in the best interests of the public.

Oregon's water belongs to the public, not any one special interest group. At a minimum, we must firmly apply statewide our existing water rights laws, recognizing that many were crafted at a time with more abundant water and little knowledge of the literal and metaphorical downstream effects of over-extraction.

Exempting irrigators in one area of the state from important water laws that every other farmer in Oregon must adhere to is not good for the Columbia River, the Umatilla Basin, or our state. This bill undermines the Oregon Water Resources Department's ability to manage over 700,000 acres of irrigated agriculture, and sets a dangerous precedent that will lead to endless litigation, further exceptions and great harm to the public interests..

Finally, I am also concerned about the effect of increased agriculture on the groundwater quality of the Lower Umatilla Basin Ground Water Management Area, as increased irrigation risks increased nitrate inputs into groundwater. Before taking actions that would further harm our environment and pose increased risks to public health (see Drinking Water Nitrate and Human Health: An Updated Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health. 2018 Jul 23;15(7):1557.)

Please oppose this bill.

Sincerely,

Thomas G. Cooney MD MACP FRCP
Professor of Medicine