

Representative Ken Helm, Co-Chair
Representative Mark Owens, Co-Chair
Representative Sarah Finger-McDonald, Vice-Chair
House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Salem, OR 97301

February 8, 2026

Re: Opposition to HB 4006

Dear Co-Chair Helm, Co-Chair Owens, Vice-Chair Finger-McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Robert Dickinson, and I'm writing to submit testimony in opposition to HB 4006.

I respectfully urge you to oppose HB 4006 because it creates a special carve-out from Oregon's water laws for a specific set of irrigators, at exactly the time when Oregon needs consistent, science-based water management that protects public health, fish and wildlife, and long-term water security for all communities.

1) HB 4006 sets a troubling precedent by creating a carve-out from statewide water rules.

Oregon's water laws should apply fairly and consistently across the state. Creating a special exemption for a particular geography or group of water users undermines the principle of equal treatment under the law and invites additional carve-outs in the future. That kind of fragmentation is the opposite of what we need as water scarcity and conflict increase.

2) HB 4006 risks weakening Oregon's ability to manage water effectively and consistently.

Water rights administration is complex, and the state's regulatory framework exists for a reason: to provide clear standards, accountability, and predictability. HB 4006 would erode that statewide framework and could diminish the Oregon Water Resources Department's ability to administer and enforce water policy in a consistent way.

3) HB 4006 raises serious public health and groundwater quality concerns—especially around nitrate contamination.

In regions already struggling with groundwater quality, including areas where nitrates are a known concern, Oregon should be moving toward stronger protections and clear accountability, not looser rules. Irrigation practices can directly affect groundwater quality. A bill that could enable expanded irrigation or reduce oversight risks worsening contamination and shifting health and cleanup costs onto residents and local communities.

4) HB 4006 could increase environmental harm, including impacts to fish.

The Columbia River system and its tributaries support ecologically and culturally significant fish runs, including salmon and steelhead. Any policy that reduces oversight or increases risk to instream flows should be treated with caution. Oregon should prioritize policies that protect aquatic habitat and ecosystem resilience—particularly in a changing climate.

5) HB 4006 moves Oregon in the wrong direction given drought and climate pressures.

As drought conditions intensify and hydrologic patterns become less predictable, the state needs a comprehensive and science-based approach that reduces risk statewide. HB 4006 instead takes a piecemeal approach and creates uneven rules that can undermine long-term planning and public trust.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to oppose HB 4006. Thank you for considering my comments and for your work on behalf of Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Robert Dickinson