

Oppose HB 4006

Representative Kenneth Helm, Chair
Members, Oregon House Natural Resources Committee

I am writing to you regarding a legislative bill to be heard before your committee today.

As an Oregon river and fish advocate for more than 35 years, I urge a No vote on HB 4006.

Oregon's water belongs exclusively to the public - which means every Oregonian - both presently alive and that belongs to future Oregonians, yet unborn.

I have personally worked on creating and solving Columbia River water issues over the past few decades - these efforts were always cooperative and often consensus-based efforts involving a wide range of interested parties. HB 4006 is the result of none of this effort - it is not the "Oregon Way" and therefore HB 4006 should be left to wither in the dust.

Exempting irrigators in one specific area of Oregon from important water laws that every other farmer in the state must adhere to is bad public policy, it is not good for the Columbia River, the Umatilla Basin, or any of Oregon's fish and wildlife.

While the Columbia River (essentially reservoirs and lakes behind salmon-killing dams) looks as if there is plenty of water to allow more water to be diverted in this Mid-Columbia region, in fact, the Columbia River flows are inadequate to support fish and other beneficial uses.

The bill notes there is no change to the rate and duty, but this hides the fact that changes in points of diversion as well as uses in shoulder-seasons are increases in the water use in a water-limited region.

This bill undermines most every past effort to conservatively manage public water in northeast Oregon, and it hamstrings the Oregon Water Resources Department's (ORWD) ability to conservatively and properly manage water use over 700,000 acres of irrigated agriculture.

This is a dangerous precedent for the entire state.

HB 4006 will intensify and further degrade the critical groundwater issues facing the Lower Umatilla Basin. Oregon has FAILED the citizens in this region by not swiftly addressing the effects of agricultural practices on the groundwater quality in the Lower Umatilla Basin Ground Water Management Area, where increased irrigation is increasing nitrate and other pollutants into groundwater drinking supplies.

This is bad public policy, bad for Oregon citizens who do not have safe water to drink in their homes, and bad for wild salmon in Oregon, Washington and Idaho.

I urge you to move this bill to the dustbin.

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