



OREGON
ASSOCIATION OF
NURSERIES™



February 9, 2026

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
Oregon State Legislature
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support for HB 4006

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

We are writing in support of HB 4006. This geographically specific legislation will allow an intergovernmental entity to manage water supplies in a more holistic approach, similar to irrigation districts and other governmental entities that deliver water. Together and individually, our associations advocate for common-sense water policies that move Oregon's economy, communities, and environment toward a more secure water future. HB 4006 is an example of a collaborative, community-based approach that will help meet water needs in the region efficiently and equitably.

Key Components of HB 4006:

- Amends existing authorities for irrigation districts and similar government entities to include an intergovernmental entity, formed under ORS Chapter 190, which will allow for better management and optimization of Columbia River water once it is diverted out of the river.
- Enables the intergovernmental entity the authority to move the same diversion rate, currently authorized to be diverted out of the river, between diversions within its boundaries as long as the season of use does not change and the maximum daily pumping rate is maintained
- Allows the intergovernmental entity to participate in the district mapping process to reset outdated place-of-use boundaries of the participating water rights into a realistic management boundary for the 21st century. This is similar to existing process used by irrigation districts and will allow for better external management and tracking of water rights managed by the entity.
- HB 4006 is limited to a specific 51 river-mile stretch of the Columbia River, which comprises roughly 4% of a 1,243-mile-long system. This allows for lessons to be learned from this regional approach without risking unintended consequences to other areas. Moreover, the bill focuses on diversions from the Columbia River, as opposed to smaller streams and tributaries.
- HB 4006 includes measurement and reporting requirements which will yield valuable information for other potential regional approaches as well as provide appropriate sideboards for this innovative approach. The bill does not change existing water use measurement and reporting requirements for irrigation districts and similar entities and will allow for more comprehensive water use measurement and reporting, increasing available data for the region.

Regional Collaborative Approach

The bill is limited to a small portion of the state but will yield valuable information for other regions about potential tools for addressing surface and groundwater scarcity. HB 4006 was developed as part of basin wide collaborative planning efforts, which also aligns with Oregon's Integrated Water Resources Strategy. Regional collaborative approaches to water management are key to meeting the needs of all water users in an increasingly water scarce environment. Some of these approaches may warrant legislative change and without trying we will never learn what can work and what needs to be improved.

Focused Water Rights Regulation

HB 4006 does not remove the ability of Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to regulate water rights in the region and instead helps focus limited state agency resources on key water management areas in the Basin. The region will still be required to maintain compliance with applicable maximum diversion rate from the Columbia River and total duty rates within the entity's boundary. OWRD will continue its oversight and regulatory responsibilities at the points of diversion on the Columbia River but will no longer need to go past the diversion point

This will improve the workload of overburdened staff, allowing them to focus on more critical transactions and improving opportunities for reducing backlog in other areas. This is even more critical as our state works to address a large budget deficit that will undoubtedly lead to staff and program reductions. State resources should be focused on monitoring and enforcing water rights at the points of diversion, not on trivial individual water transactions within the system. Instead, those responsibilities will be left to local government—in this instance the Mid-Columbia Water Commission—in the same way that those responsibilities are already left to local agricultural and municipal water supply entities now. The bill is simply adding to the types of governmental entities already authorized to manage the conveyance and distribution of water within their boundaries.

We will also add that concerns about “water spreading” or legalizing “enlargement,” are misleading as HB 4006 does not authorize any increase in what is legally allowed under existing water rights. It does not change the rate, duty, or season of use of the existing water rights. It does allow for water to be better managed, because it will be treated more holistically, ensuring that water gets to where it's needed and when it's needed within the water delivery system. This is a community based, cooperative, “what is best for all” approach, which is in part why districts exist in the first place.

While the regional approach is novel, the authorities and approaches to water management are well established. Irrigation districts and similar entities already have the authorities and ability to manage water within their boundaries—and these authorities are mirrored in different statutes and rules for municipal and regional domestic water suppliers. The districts are responsible for managing water within their boundaries and are already required to measure and report water use from the points of diversion they deliver water from.

In conclusion, we urge the Committee to pass HB 4006 and help add to Oregon's portfolio of water management options.

Sincerely,
Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN)
Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB)
Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC)
League of Oregon Cities (LOC)