



HJR 25
Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon
Submitted to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
April 9, 2013

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's rivers, lakes and streams. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch opposes HJR 25

HJR 25 proposes an amendment to the Oregon Constitution prohibiting government imposition of fees or taxes on the construction, alteration, abandonment, conversion or operation of water wells. This would apply to all wells including, but not limited to domestic, industrial, municipal, irrigation and agricultural wells.

WaterWatch opposes this resolution. It is not good public policy to prohibit the state from imposing reasonable fees to help manage the many wells across the state.

Reasonable fees help the state to manage wells for public health and the protection of water right holders, as well as resource protection. This resolution could undermine efforts by the Water Resources Department to ensure that well construction, alteration, abandonment, conversion and/or operation is not only safe, but that it will not harm our underground aquifers and/or nearby streams. The resolution could also undermine work by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Oregon Health Authority to ensure that groundwater, including that under the drinking water program, meet state and federal water quality standards.

There are many harms that can result from poor well construction including, pollution of aquifers/drinking water sources from surface sources of pollution, cross contamination of aquifers by improperly screened or constructed wells, and negative impacts to senior ground and surface water users and groundwater dependent ecosystems/streamflows by uncontrolled construction. Elimination of current fees would result in the elimination of a number of key groundwater positions within the Water Resources Department. This would undercut the ability of the Department to ensure compliance with well construction standards, protect existing water right holders, manage groundwater limited areas in the state, and locate wells to understand effects of groundwater use and sustainability of use on resources.

By statute, all waters of the state belong to the public. Waters are managed both for the benefit of water users, but also for the public good. This bill undercuts the ability of the state to ensure that the interests of all citizen of the state---including well owners--- are protected. We urge you to reject this resolution.

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