



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

April 16, 2013

To: Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Senator Jackie Dingfelder, Chair
Members of the Committee

Re: SB 217, Water Rights Management Fee – SUPPORT

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has strong positions on both water quality and quantity. We were active participants in the development of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

We watched the Water Resources Commission (WRC) Revenue Subcommittee consider a number of funding options so the department could “carry out its mission and legal responsibilities”. Their guiding principles: ***“Those who benefit should pay; Solutions should be equitable among water user groups; Fees should be dedicated to the purpose for which they are collected; Logistical considerations to implement the revenue sources must be reasonable”.***

They considered 29 funding options as a result of a conversation with over 30 organizations. Staff researched these ideas and presented information to the WRC for consideration. They again engaged stakeholders in the discussions and provided regular updates to the full Commission. The conclusion of the WRC was to recommend the fee you see embodied in SB 217. The fee will be used to provide field staff and science-based data to support and protect the 85,000 water rights holders, both senior and junior.

The League understands the concerns around equity and that many water rights holders are in the agricultural community. That industry, second in Oregon, is important to Oregon’s economy. So we support the cap embodied in the bill.

We also recognize that people who receive their water from water districts or cities will not see a direct impact from this fee. We have all along supported an equitable fee for those water rights holders.

This is not an easy decision. But Oregon has underfunded the Water Resources Department for years. Water is critical to our economy and to the public in general. We have to find a way to fund this department in a way that these water rights holders’ rights are protected as well as the general public’s ownership of those waters.

We ask that you support SB 217 and send it to Ways and Means so that water rights are effectively managed in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Robin Wisdom
President

Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator