



SB 203

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon Submitted to Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources February 16, 2015

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.

As currently drafted, WaterWatch of Oregon opposes SB 203.

Section 1(1) of SB 203 directs the coordination of natural resource agencies. While this, in and of itself might not appear troubling, without a clarifying statement that this coordination should only occur if such coordination will not compromise agency autonomy, mission and policy, the bill could lead to the usurping of agency independence in decision-making, policy setting and prioritization.

Moreover, Sections 1(2) and (3) also have the potential to undermine agency missions and/or policies by allowing public functions to be carried out by private entities or local governments rather than by state agencies. Sections 1(2)(b) and (2)(d), read with (3)(a) and (3)(b), allow partnerships between state agencies and other political subdivisions of this state and/or private entities to "share expertise or capacities" and/or "share administrative functions in a manner that improves efficiencies or lowers costs."

State agencies provide a unique function to all the citizens of the state. Private interests and/or local governments do not share this trust responsibility. Allowing private interests and/or local governments to undertake administrative functions that currently reside within the state (i.e. the issuance of state water rights) could undermine state policy and/or service. Moreover, sharing "expertise" could lend undue influence over agency decisions, and/or result in biased decision-making.

And finally, Section 1(4) designates a "Natural Resource Partnership Coordinator" to be appointed by Governor. This, also, could also work to undermine agency autonomy. Given other state programs that seek to somewhat curb agency autonomy, i.e. Regional Solutions, this trend is of concern, especially when the Natural Resource agencies in Section 1 have such differing, and somewhat conflicting, missions.

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