



HB 3169

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon Submitted to House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water

March 17, 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.

WaterWatch opposes HB 3169 as drafted

What HB 3169 does: HB 3169 directs the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD) to study all aquifers of the state, and to report findings by November 2015. The bill also sets up a Domestic Well Improvement Fund.

WaterWatch agrees with bill sponsors that there is a need for the WRD to comprehensively study all groundwater aquifers of this state. However, as drafted the bill does not allow the state enough time to complete the needed studies, does not specify that these studies should be done in coordination with the United States Geological Service (USGS), does not specify that the studies include an assessment of the hydraulic connection to surface water, and, importantly, does not provide for the funding needed for the WRD to complete this undertaking.

Late spring, summer and early fall surface waters are largely over-appropriated across the state, meaning the state cannot grant new surface water rights during those times. As a result, people seeking new water rights are becoming more reliant upon groundwater. However, in recent years the state has not had adequate resources to partner with the USGS to complete comprehensive groundwater investigations statewide. Thus, decisions regarding groundwater appropriation are often made without full understanding of the capacity of the resource and/or the degree of interconnectedness to surface water sources.

The need for groundwater studies was highlighted in the 2012 Integrated Water Resources Strategy (see attached excerpt). Thus far only three WRD/USGS groundwater investigations have been completed—the Deschutes, Upper Klamath and Willamette. The state has prioritized areas that need further study, including the Umatilla and Malheur, but funding has been inadequate to move forward in a timely manner. In the mid-1990's, the legislature provided WRD with up to \$1.2 million per biennium towards USGS/WRD groundwater investigations

(USGS provided 50% match at that time), which allowed the completion of the Deschutes, Klamath and Willamette Groundwater Investigations. Funding amounts fell in the early-mid 2000's. In the 2009-2011 and 2011-2013 bienniums the WRD received zero dollars for groundwater investigations. In 2013-2015 the WRD was given \$375K in general funds towards groundwater investigations. This amount is now part of the WRD base budget and is included in the 2015-2017 Governor's Recommended Budget. WaterWatch supports the continued funding of groundwater investigations as part of the WRD base budget; however, while \$375k per biennium is a great improvement over recent years, it is not adequate to fund studies of all the river basins of the state in any near term time frame, and most certainly not by November 2015.

As an additional point, the WRD/USGS groundwater studies typically take multiple years to complete. The timeframe provided by HB 3169 simply does not give the state adequate time to complete even one regional study similar to those conducted in the Deschutes, Upper Klamath and Willamette basins, let alone complete this work statewide .

In closing, while we oppose HB 3169 as drafted, we think the bill raises an important issue and hope that this bill elevates conversations in the Legislature about the need for WRD/USGS groundwater investigations statewide, and the need for funding necessary for WRD to achieve this important work.

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