



## **HB 3417**

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

**April 9, 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 supports HB 3417**

What HB 3417 does: HB 3417 clarifies that the public notice and comment period identified in the Regional Solutions statutes shall be at least a minimum 30 day period.

Why this bill is needed: Currently, Regional Solutions is only offering a 7 day notice and comment period for regional solutions meetings, which makes it very difficult for meaningful review, consideration, drafting and meeting travel for many Oregonians.

The importance of public involvement: Many Regional Solutions priorities and/or implementation projects affect Oregon's lands, air and water. Allowing public input into decisions that affect state owned resources is critical to the success of the program. Without meaningful public notice and comment period, this program will leave many Oregonians feeling disenfranchised and could affect the ultimate success of the program.

Currently, there are eleven Regional Solutions Centers across the state. Former Governor Kitzhaber appointed Regional Advisory Committees for each of these regions. These Regional Advisory Committees are made up largely of business interests and local elected officials. These Regional Advisory Committees are charged with adopting "regional priorities". They also are involved in the adoption of regional implementation projects and disbursement of state funds to projects. State agencies, including Natural Resource Agencies are required to work with Regional Solutions to fulfill regional priorities. The Regional Solutions program is affecting agency staff time, resources and priorities. Given that many of these regional priorities affect public natural resources that belong to all Oregonians, having a meaningful role for public input is critical. The public notice and comment provision is the only avenue for public involvement in regional solutions. Thus, the importance of a robust public and comment period is paramount.

Conclusion: WaterWatch has long supported collaborative regional planning and has participated in broad stakeholder agreements that have contributed to sustainable community and economic development while protecting environmental goals, including in the Rogue (WISE), Deschutes, Willamette, and Umatilla Basins (CRUST). However, in our experience, those that are transparent, open and invite public input are the most successful. A thirty day public notice/comment period will help with Regional Solutions accountability.

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