

Senators and Representative Rayfield,

I'm writing this morning in support of the SB 247 and the fee increases it outlines. Please enter this letter of support into the OLIS record.

We're facing significant challenges as habitat change accelerates across the west. I live in the central part of the state, an area that's at an uncomfortable crossroads with regard to water. Public representation is being spearheaded by employees of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). SB 247 will provide funds necessary for ODFW personnel to remain engaged.

Background: While some of Central Oregon's agricultural regions, especially those served by the North Unit Irrigation District, are doing well, others, like the region served by the Central Oregon Irrigation District (COID), are struggling due to poor management practices.

North Unit farmers have successfully dealt with being junior water right holders for 100 years, and as a result have dramatically improved their on-farm efficiencies as well as closely track the amount of water each patron is using. As a result of these adaptations, farmers within the North Unit Irrigation District have become the gold standard in the high desert region

Conversely, the Central Oregon Irrigation District has tried to improve its financial position by chasing hydropower revenue rather than help their patrons improve on-farm efficiencies. As a result agricultural operations served by COID are now collectively unprofitable without subsidies from state and federal agencies.

Doubling down, COID is now aggressively lobbying Salem and D.C. for add'l public funds to expand their hydropower operations. They say that they'll use the hydropower revenue "in the future" to fund system improvements. Unfortunately all they've done with the profits to date is fund new revenue projects, like the Juniper Ridge facility, while paying lip service to true conservation efforts and eroding trust within the Upper Deschutes Basin.

We're working through a Basin Study Work Group (BSWG) process as well as a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to address the growing conflict between agricultural practices and environmental species like anadromous fish and the Oregon Spotted Frog. State agency employees from ODFW are working hard to offset the uncooperative bad actors, like COID, in collaborative processes like BSWG and the HCP. The fee increases outlined in SB 247 will insure that we don't lose key public agency employees, particularly aquatic biologists, at critical junctures in these ongoing efforts.

Please support SB 247. The proposed increases will adjust the fee schedule for inflation, and will keep our ODFW employees at the tables where the environments our children will inherit are being shaped.

Many thanks,

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