



HB 4012

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

February 3, 2016

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 4012, a bill that would create a new and unnecessary funding source for new water storage and delivery projects.

In the course of the past decade there have been a number of bills approved by the legislature to develop a well-functioning water supply development loan and grant fund to fund instream and out-of-stream water development projects, including storage (e.g. HB 1069(2008), HB 3369(2009), SB 839(2013)). Two common themes in these efforts have been: (1) the recognition that if state funds are to be used to fund private projects, then the water development project should provide public benefits; and (2) that if water development project is a storage project, that the associated storage of water would be done in a way to preserve the full suite of flows--including high winter flows---necessary for biological requirements of fish and geomorphologic needs and rivers. These requirements were most recently codified by SB 839 (2013), which establishes the Water Supply Development Fund (ORS 541.656)

The newly proposed Water Storage Fund found in HB 4012, does not recognize or include these modern day sideboards. HB 4012 would provide an end run to public benefit and seasonal varying flow requirements of the funding tools so recently passed by the Legislature.

Importantly, the modern day funding tools embodied in SB 839 (2013) were developed in consultation with broad array of stakeholders, including irrigation, agricultural, municipal, conservation and tribal interests. Endless hours were spent by all parties trying to craft a program that would be the "go to" fund for water development into the future. The development of a new Water Storage Fund will compromise all this past work and set the state backwards in its efforts to develop sustainable water supply projects.

Conclusion: This bill is unnecessary. Proceeds from lottery bonds can already support storage projects through the fund created by SB 839(2013). Any monies for water development should be dedicated to the existing fund. We urge the Committee to reject this attempted end run around the state's existing loan and grant programs.

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