



## HB 4113

### 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 supports HB 4113, a bill that would establish a task force on drought emergency response.**

What HB 4113 does: HB 4113 establishes a task force on drought to research and evaluate potential tools to prepare for and/or deal with drought emergencies. The bill seeks to identify tools to minimize the impact of drought on agriculture, municipal, fish and wildlife and other interests.

WaterWatch is especially supportive of the bill's direction to identify options to minimize the impacts of drought on fish and wildlife (Section 1(4)(c)). As the Committee is likely aware, 2105 brought a year of extreme drought, with twenty five of Oregon's thirty six counties receiving a state drought emergency declaration from the Governor. And while drought declarations allow consumptive water users to utilize a suite of tools under the drought emergency statutes, there are virtually no tools for protection of fish or streamflows under today's existing drought statutes. *See* ORS 536.700 *et al.* As a result, low streamflows and/or high water temperatures caused fish kills across the state and these problems went unaddressed despite the drought declarations. The state needs to institute tools to address this serious problem.

Additionally, drought or not, the state needs to do a better job to enable better water management across the state. For instance, roughly half of the water right holders across the state are not required to measure and report the amount of water they are taking from our rivers and streams. Without basic tools such as statewide measurement in place, the state cannot adequately manage our water resources during even the best of water years, let alone drought. We are hopeful that the task force will look at some of the basic tools needed to protect all water users alike—whether farmer, city, boater or fish. And while HB 4113 only focuses on short term drought remedies, we are hopeful that it will provide a building block for necessary advancements in water management across the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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