



West Extension Irrigation District

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February 24, 2016

To: Joint Committee on Ways & Means, Subcommittee on General Government
From: West Extension Irrigation District
Re: **HB 4012A**

Dear Co-Chair Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

West Extension Irrigation District (WEID) holds senior water rights to withdraw irrigation water from the Umatilla River. We have long been concerned that junior groundwater users in the Umatilla Basin are adversely affecting these rights. We are most concerned about, and opposed to, any legislative effort to weaken OWRD's authority to regulate groundwater for the protection of senior water rights.

Our immediate concern is that House Bill 4012A could be amended to include new limits on the ability of OWRD to continue to manage and regulate groundwater use. Our concern has been heightened by the content of House Bill 4037, which contains just such restrictions, and the possibility that concepts from that bill could be inserted into House Bill 4012A by amendment. From WEID's perspective, OWRD is reluctant to regulate groundwater even when the negative impacts to senior water rights are apparent and well-documented. Far from being an overzealous regulator, OWRD has, in our view, been extremely cautious about exercising its authority.

To the extent HB 4012 is amended to limit OWRD's powers to manage groundwater, we believe it would be unwise public policy. In the Umatilla basin and elsewhere around the state, rampant groundwater pumping has exacerbated surface water declines. Unregulated mining of alluvial aquifers by scores of wells can, over time, render senior surface rights useless, effectively making them junior to groundwater users' newer rights. We are attempting to work with OWRD to enhance and improve groundwater enforcement and regulation to take into account the systematic and cumulative effects of ever-increasing pumping. We earnestly hope that effort is not undermined by any new legislative limitations on OWRD's authority to do its job.

We would be happy to elaborate on our concerns, if you desire that we do so. Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beverly J. Bridgewater". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Beverly J. Bridgewater, District Manager
West Extension Irrigation District