



February 25, 2016

**Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction
Co-Chairs Senator Fred Girod and Representative Tobias Read**

**Testimony on Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Study Budget Proposals
Senate Bill 5701 -4 Amendments**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of -4 amendments to SB 5701 that would authorize funding for budget proposals related to the study of groundwater in the Greater Harney Valley.

Harney County has experienced significant groundwater development over the years with most development occurring in the “Greater Harney Valley Area.” In issuing new water rights, the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) is obligated to protect the long-term sustainability of the groundwater resource and to protect existing water right holders.

In 2015, the Department began denying new groundwater rights in the Greater Harney Valley Area, after an analysis found declining groundwater levels, and that issuance of new permits would appropriate water beyond the capacity of the resource, which could harm existing water users. Before considering the issuance of new permits, the Department needs to conduct a groundwater study to understand whether there may be sections of the basin that can still allow for new uses. While the study is being conducted, the Department is working with the community to identify interim tools to meet new water needs.

The community has asked the state to complete the groundwater study as quickly as possible. The Department has utilized available funds and resources in its existing budget to begin data collection efforts, but these existing resources are insufficient. Groundwater studies usually take 4-5 years to complete. Committing resources this biennium allows for more rapid and complete data collection early in the basin study process, resulting in improved data coverage and quality to help ensure timely completion of the study.

The Department is requesting \$705,288 funding for staff, observation wells, and cost-share as follows:

- Hydrogeologist [General Fund \$130,288 – NRS 4 Permanent FTE] – This position would analyze groundwater data for the basin study to establish the nature and extent of the aquifer system and low permeability units in the basin, as well as conduct complex data analyses associated with the basin water budget.
- Observation Wells [General Fund \$400,000] – Funding would be used to drill and construct ten state observation wells necessary to conduct the groundwater study.
- Cooperative Study Cost-Share [General Fund \$175,000] – Funding would be used as cost-share to have the US Geological Survey and other scientists to begin work on basin water budget and recharge analysis, hydrogeological characterization and data analyses, and groundwater basin boundaries. Partnering with the US Geological Survey leverages additional federal dollars.

Thank you for your consideration.

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