

Bob Oleson, House Energy and Environment Committee Statement, 3/22/2017

It is my privilege to be here today, primarily being here for our states fisheries and many of its licensed anglers. The Association of Northwest Steelheaders and other conservation related organizations strongly support these important long needed bills.

About 10 years ago I first became interested in this set of issues when attending my first hearing on a fish bill and ended up sitting through a long hearing dealing with whether the state should measure how much water is being extracted by ranchers and irrigators. I was dumbfounded there seemed to be little interest in finding out who is using how much of the public resource water.

Now in 2017 there is much more general knowledge about the direct relationship between large scale water consumption and the well-being of fish and habitat. But there are still critical gaps in knowledge involving what and where this water consumption occurs. Today there is a greater understanding of the negative consequences resulting from shrinking stream flows and aquifers. I believe fish and the rest of us will significantly benefit with more accurate measurement of this water use.

Most of us can relate to groundwater as the source of our drinking water. But it also supplies a base flow for rivers, lakes and wetlands. This is something that maintains the health of our fisheries and ecosystems.

There is no question programs to restore and protect stream flows now require more attention from the state. Climate changes and population pressures have increase the stakes. In order to have WRD fulfill its responsibilities, this legislation asks water users to share in the responsibility for managing their water rights via a shared annual fee.

Ten years ago I was shocked to see very little political support here at the committee level for advancing water measurement and management legislation. This session on behalf of fish and the public you have the opportunity to advance positive change, at a time when it is needed more than ever.