

Date: February 10, 2017
To: House Committee on Energy and Environment
From: The Association of Oregon Counties
Subject: Support of House Bills 2295 and 2296

Please let the records of the House Energy and Environment Committee show that the Association of Oregon Counties, representing all 36 county governments, unequivocally **supports House Bills 2295 and 2296**, on the committee's agenda for public hearing on February 13, 2017.

House Bill 2295

Last modified in 2013, the current fee schedule of the Water Resources Department (WRD) is due to sunset on June 30, 2017, reverting back to 2009 fee levels, while costs are projected to increase by 15.88 percent over the next four years. With the reductions in staff, it will take longer to process water right transactions as backlogs build, causing farmers, water providers, and others to wait longer to receive decisions on water supply proposals.

HB 2295 would retain current staffing levels through 2021 for water right processing and dam safety by removing the sunset on the current fee schedules and increasing fees by approximately 15.88 percent averaged over the four-year period.

The Legislature, after a long period of cuts to WRD budgets and inaction on the need for water development, put Oregon well behind Washington State on water availability. Fortunately, the 2013 Legislature sharply changed course and since has continued the infusion of resources for water development.

An appropriately staffed and functioning WRD means more availability of clean, abundant water that is the basis for economic and community development, ecosystem health, and Oregon's famous quality of life. Oregon should not return to chronically falling short of current and future needs, caused by increasing population, climate change, and other facts of life.

House Bill 2296

Poorly constructed and improperly decommissioned wells can lead to groundwater contamination and the inadvertent draining of Oregon's groundwater aquifers. Oregon's groundwater is becoming even more critical to the state's water supply. It must be protected.

To ensure wells are properly constructed and decommissioned, and to protect future uses of groundwater for drinking, agriculture, and other needs, WRD sets well construction standards, licenses well drillers, approves landowner permits, and inspects wells.

Current well construction fees and bonding requirements do not come close to covering the actual costs incurred by WRD. HB 2296 raises fees and bond requirements to appropriate minimum levels.