



## HB 2296

### **Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon Submitted to the House Energy and Environment Committee February 13, 2017**

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 2296**

By statute, all waters of the state belong to the public---including groundwater. The Water Resources Department is charged with managing the ground waters of the state; however, currently there are negligible fees associated with the complex business of ensuring that wells are properly constructed and decommissioned. Poorly constructed wells and/or improper decommissioning of wells can lead to groundwater contamination. This puts existing and future water right holders at risk, as well as harming the greater public interest in the resource.

Rivers and streams across Oregon's are over-appropriated during the irrigation season, meaning that the state cannot issue new surface water rights during this period. The result is that the majority of new water right applications are for groundwater use. As highlighted in the 2016 Oregonian series "*Draining Oregon*", this increased use of groundwater is putting stresses on our state's aquifers. Now more than ever it is imperative that the Water Resources Department have the resources to properly manage our state's groundwater, which at a minimum includes ensuring that wells are constructed and decommissioned correctly to prevent contamination and waste.

The bill imposes minimal fees on well owners to help the state manage these private wells. It also increases the well construction bonding requirements. These fees are necessary to help the Water Resources Department manage our state's groundwater resources and are properly borne by the well owners and drillers rather than by Oregon taxpayers.

We urge the Committee to pass HB 2296.

Contacts: Kimberley Priestley, WaterWatch of Oregon, 503-295-4039 x 3, [kjp@waterwatch.org](mailto:kjp@waterwatch.org)  
Jack Dempsey, WaterWatch lobbyist, 503-358-2864, [jack@dempseypublicaffairs.com](mailto:jack@dempseypublicaffairs.com)