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Testimony in Support of HB 2084: Extension of sunset date for place-based integrated water resources.

House Committee on Energy and Environment

Submitted by: Zach Freed, Hydrologist, The Nature Conservancy

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2084, a bill to extend the sunset date for the Oregon Water Resources Department grant program for place-based integrated water resource strategies. The Nature Conservancy believes that the water management collaboratives are an invaluable platform for planning a secure and resilient water supply for Oregon's communities.

The Nature Conservancy is a science-based and non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. The organization was incorporated in Oregon in 1961, and today we have over 70,000 supporters statewide with members in every county in Oregon. Our staff, based in communities across the state, work collaboratively with tribes, government agencies, elected officials, landowners, businesses, and stakeholders to develop solutions to the challenges facing people and nature.

In 2015, the Oregon Water Resources Department launched a pilot program for collaborative, community-based water management. The need for local, collaborative water planning was identified in the 2017 statewide Integrated Water Resources Strategy. There are now four coalitions, comprised of a diverse set of stakeholders, that are developing a shared understanding of water resource challenges and identifying solutions that are appropriate for their community. The place-based integrated water resource planning represents an opportunity to benefit local economies, at-risk communities, and sensitive ecosystems in a way that traditional water management does not. Given our experience, we feel strongly that these water planning efforts are vital for solving Oregon's looming water resource challenges.

We have been working closely with the community-based water planning effort in the Harney Basin, which is co-convened by the Harney County Watershed Council and the Harney County Court. Under their leadership, a diverse group of stakeholders have added their voices in defining Harney County's water future. The Nature Conservancy participates on the collaborative's Coordinating Committee, has led the development of technical products associated with groundwater-dependent ecosystems, and is co-developing reports via the

Harney Ecological Working Group. We are also leading a study of groundwater-dependent ecosystems in the Harney Basin to fill critical information gaps for the collaborative.

Through these efforts, The Nature Conservancy has been well-positioned to observe the foundations of success that the place-based integrated water resource efforts have established in the Harney Basin. A wide range of stakeholders have participated in the collaborative effort, including state agencies, irrigators, domestic well users, and conservation organizations. The Harney Basin collaborative has made significant progress in identifying water resource issues and exploring potential strategies and solutions. However, the challenges faced by the community are complex and require additional time and resources to address. Continued support of the place-based integrated water resource planning efforts is critical to their success.

In closing, The Nature Conservancy values and supports efforts to balance water for people, working landscapes, and nature. We support the passage of HB 2084 and urge you to vote yes on it.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

For More Information Contact: **Zach Freed, zach.freed@tnc, 503-802-8151**