



Testimony to the House Committee on Energy and Environment

SUPPORT FOR HB 2819 (Dash 1 Amendments)

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Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Reschke, Vice-Chair Schouten and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Northeast Oregon Water Association (NOWA) we would like to thank you for hearing HB 2819 with the Dash 1 Amendments and wish to express our full support for its passage at the full funding level requested. NOWA is a non-profit organization that advocates for the protection and enhancement of our value-added natural resource based economy in Northeast Oregon. Our membership includes landowners of over 200,000 acres of the highest valued food production land in Oregon as well as the counties, cities, ports, businesses and NGO's that generate over \$2 billion a year in agri-business output in our region and for the State. As you no doubt understand, the most significant natural resource issue affecting our region's future is a sustainable water supply.

What does HB 2819, as amended by the Dash 1 Amendments, do?

HB 2819 requires the Oregon Water Resources Department to establish a pilot program to enable the Umatilla Basin to begin to save and recover its deep basalt groundwater aquifers. HB 2819 implements sections of many of the region's long-standing "place-based" plans¹ to optimize existing and newly mitigated Columbia River water rights to both maintain and grow its value-added natural resource based economy while also taking pressures off of over-stressed aquifers that are needed to maintain municipal growth as well as to ensure a drought and climate change resilient water supply portfolio for future generations.

HB 2819 is a pilot program that does two things:

1. Ensures that landowners participating in the program are protected from losing their senior groundwater rights and ensures that the state will protect groundwater saved by willing landowners throughout the duration of this test
2. Provides funding for a limited amount of time to off-set the difference between more expensive, yet more sustainable Columbia River water, and cheaper yet less sustainable groundwater thereby ensuring that a water rights holder wanting to participate in this groundwater recovery test will not be impacted financially by wanting to do the right thing

¹ Umatilla Groundwater Task Force Report to the Governor (1986), Umatilla Sub-Basin 2050 Water Management Plan (2008), Columbia River – Umatilla Solutions Task Force Declaration of Cooperation (2013), Governor's Task Force on Umatilla Basin Basalt Stabilization (December, 2018)

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HB 2819 is the next step in the Umatilla Basin’s multi-step plan to long-term water supply sustainability

HB 2819 proves that short and long-term commitments struck by water rights holders, neighbors, interest groups and the State during transparent and formal planning efforts, will be honored. As identified in the attached report of the Governor’s Basalt Groundwater Stabilization Work Group, HB 2819 is the next step in a multi-biennial water management plan that the Umatilla Basin region made with the state and multiple stakeholders during the 2015 Legislative Session. Passage of HB 2819 is a positive step in providing assurances that the Umatilla Basin and other basins embarking on their own long-term water planning and implementation strategies will have a pathway towards implementing the various steps identified in their plans over time.

The State and other basins can learn from the basalt stabilization testing HB 2819 will fund in the Umatilla Basin

There is a lot of interest statewide in developing and implementing strategies to conserve, save and protect groundwater aquifers of various types and for various uses. While aquifer systems, just like surface water systems, are diverse throughout the state, lessons learned from this test may better inform basins going through groundwater studies or local place-based planning efforts so that once they get to their implementation scenarios they are better able to select those that have a stronger likelihood of success in achieving their desired goals.

Additionally, we recognize that there may be future interest in developing statewide policies for protecting and conserving groundwater similar to the way that the instream leasing and allocation of conserved programs protect and optimize surface water resources for various uses. Our hope is that tests such as that outlined in HB 2819 will better inform long-term policy considerations related to conserving and maintaining groundwater aquifers.

Need for additional amendments

Based on discussions with the Oregon Water Resources Department and select interest groups we understand that there is a need for additional technical amendments and a few modifications to clarify intent and protections under existing law. We are committed to working with OWRD and other stakeholders to complete those amendments to ensure the pilot project can proceed and feel like we have made steady progress on the necessary technical amendments over the past two days.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2819 with the Dash-1 amendments. We truly believe this bill will enable our Basin to begin reversing the “draining Oregon” trend and set our region on a pathway to long-term water sustainability and long-term drought and climate change resiliency.