



HB 2856

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon
By Kimberley Priestley
Submitted to the House Energy and Environment Committee
February 26, 2019

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 2856—Appropriations for groundwater studies, investigations, data for groundwater management

WaterWatch supports HB 2856, a bill that would appropriate general fund monies to the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) for groundwater studies and investigations and other groundwater data gathering and analysis that is essential to managing Oregon's groundwater resources sustainably.

Why should the state invest in this work? Understanding the state of Oregon's groundwater resources is critical to the future of our state. With surface water in eighteen out of nineteen of Oregon's river basins over-appropriated most months of the year, more and more people are turning to groundwater to meet their demands. However, in many areas of Oregon, the OWRD lacks the scientific data to make sustainable permitting and management decisions. It is critical that the OWRD have sound science to back decisions to protect farmers, cities and groundwater dependent rivers and streams.

Funding groundwater data and analysis, including but not limited to groundwater investigations, is critical to Oregon's economic and ecological future. As highlighted in The Oregonian's five part series *Draining Oregon* (attached), the state's attempts to manage groundwater resources without a solid understanding of the capacity and limits of the resource has failed Oregonians, including in places like Harney and Umatilla counties. And while we understand this difficult budget climate, investing now will help Oregon avoid creating future "train wrecks" based on decisions that are unsupported by data or sound science.

We urge the committee to vote yes on HB 2856 to protect existing uses of groundwater and to secure a sustainable groundwater supply for the economic and ecological future for the state.

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