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Testimony in Support of HB 2856

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 2856, a bill that appropriates moneys from the General Fund to the Water Resources Department to study groundwater. The Nature Conservancy believes that conducting groundwater investigations throughout the state is critical to managing this economically and ecologically important resource.

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 2017, the Oregon Water Resources Commission updated the State's Integrated Water Resources Strategy. This document contains recommendations to help understand and meet the State's future water needs and serves as a roadmap for addressing water quantity, water quality, and ecosystem issues. The Integrated Water Resources Strategy asserts that "conducting groundwater investigations is a priority for the state." Similarly, the Oregon Water Resources Monitoring Strategy (2016) identifies groundwater as one of seven priorities for additional monitoring and investigation.

HB 2856 is necessary to meet recommendations within the Integrated Water Resources Strategy and the Water Resources Monitoring Strategy. Groundwater investigations have only been completed in three basins (Willamette, Klamath, and Deschutes), and one is in progress in the Harney basin. The Harney Basin Groundwater Study, for example, is directly addressing critical information gaps that are required for the success of the Harney Place-based Planning collaborative water management effort. The results from the Harney Basin Groundwater Study will allow stakeholders to prioritize the most appropriate strategies and implement them in the most impacted areas of the basin.

Groundwater investigations, like the one in the Harney basin, take considerable time and resources to complete. *Draining Oregon*, the 2016 Oregonian series of articles about Oregon's groundwater management, estimates that completing groundwater studies in the remaining unstudied aquifers would require between \$45 – \$75 million. If passed, this bill will represent a significant down-payment on this effort. Many communities throughout the state are facing problems associated with groundwater over-allocation. Many more communities simply don't have the information to determine whether they will be facing a groundwater crisis in the near future, or if their aquifer is being managed sustainably.

Continuing to develop the science, data, and understanding of Oregon's groundwater is fundamental to effective resource management and allows the state and stakeholders to proactively develop solutions to avoid water resource crises. The Nature Conservancy values efforts to balance water for people, working landscapes, and nature, and we urge you to vote yes on HB 2856.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

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