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April 1, 2019

Via email

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Olsen, and Members Bentz, Prozanski, and Roblan,

On behalf of Central Oregon LandWatch, thank you for the opportunity to comment on SB 946. LandWatch opposes SB 946, and urges the committee to reject the bill.

For over five years, LandWatch and other groups have actively opposed an unpermitted water ski lake in the Tumalo Deer Winter Range. The lake, which far exceeds the length of the Oregon State Capitol, is shallow, and lined with black plastic- so any water stored there rapidly evaporates. The lake was initially filled with water from the Tumalo Irrigation District under an attempted transfer of stored water. It is not the custom in the arid lands of the High Desert for irrigation districts to pump water into a shallow water ski lake with a black plastic liner that accelerates evaporation, and leave the water there to evaporate, wasting water that would otherwise be available to downstream users. What reason could there be for allowing a private landowner to waste water, at the expense of farmers? If SB 946 would authorize this type of transfer—or perhaps even retroactively ratify this very situation—it should be rejected.

Moreover, SB 946 makes no provision for evaluating harm that a transfer of stored water to a new, unpermitted location may cause to environmental values, even though normally storage permits would be reviewed for the public interest, including such values.

LandWatch opposes SB 946 as a matter of process and policy. We are concerned that the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources would give a hearing to a bill that appears to authorize uses that may be contrary to the public interest, without explicitly providing for public interest reviews.

Thank you for your consideration of these views.

Sincerely,

/s/ Paul Dewey

Paul Dewey
Director
Central Oregon LandWatch

