



April 30, 2019

To: Chair Michael Dembrow, Vice-Chair Alan Olsen and Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2084, Extension of Place-Based Planning Program

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Alan Olsen, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is testifying in support of HB 2084, which will extend the sunset date of the Place-Based Planning grant program administered by the Oregon Water Resources Department. Place-based planning is an important tool to help communities across Oregon plan for and better address complex water issues for the benefit of people, the economy, and the environment we all share.

OWRC is a nonprofit association representing irrigation districts, water control districts, improvement districts, drainage districts and other government entities delivering agricultural water supplies. The water stewards we represent operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower production, and deliver water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. OWRC has been promoting the protection and use of water rights and the wise stewardship of water resources on behalf of agricultural water suppliers for over 100 years.

OWRC has long supported voluntary and collaborative water planning efforts that bring together diverse local stakeholders to discuss water challenges and opportunities facing local communities, including agriculture, local business/industry, recreation, and the environment. Seeing the need for not only financial incentives but a state supported framework for these types of planning efforts, our organization worked with a coalition of water interests to help create the place-based planning program through SB 266 in the 2015 Session. Planning is the cornerstone for successfully developing and implementing solutions to our state's more vexing water challenges and there is currently no other state-level funding source to support these types of discussions.

There are currently four place-based planning pilot efforts underway. No OWRC members are directly involved in these efforts and we have no specific comments on individual planning activities. However, these voluntary, locally-driven collaborative planning efforts are akin to other types of planning processes our members have participated in (through basin-level studies funded by the US Bureau of Reclamation) and are great examples of how each region can benefit from grassroots level water planning discussions. The work of these diverse planning pilots are commendable, encouraging, and instrumental in providing lessons for other communities to learn from. It is no surprise that additional time is needed to develop trust amongst stakeholders and engage in frank but difficult conversations about current and future water needs. It is imperative that these four pilots have an opportunity to conclude their work so that the program can be evaluated and improved upon.

We respectfully request that you pass HB 2084 and help support voluntary, locally-driven efforts to plan for and address water related challenges and opportunities in communities around Oregon. The bill will extend the pilot program to 2023, allowing for existing pilot planning efforts to conclude, as well as an evaluation of the program and discussion of potential improvements for a future legislative session. Having a viable state funding source and framework to support collaborative planning efforts is an essential component of infrastructure investment and meeting Oregon's long-term water needs. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
April Snell
Executive Director