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Dear Co-Chairs Senator Beyer, Representative Fahey and Esteemed Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to share my observations and subsequent support for the States Drought Relief Legislative Package.

There's no hiding the fact that catastrophic drought conditions in Central Oregon and across the West have begun to take its toll on American farms and ranches. The farms and ranches North Unit irrigation District (NUID) serve are no exception. Western irrigated agriculture must be preserved and protected for a host of economic, sociological, environmental, and national security reasons. The American food consumer nationwide has access to a cornucopia of foods throughout the year largely because of Western irrigated agriculture and the projects that provide water to these farmers and ranchers.

NUID plays an invaluable role in conveying irrigation water to nearly 60,000 irrigated acres of high-value crops in Central Oregon. Over the years, NUID farmers have produced wheat, potatoes, alfalfa, grass seed, onions, garlic, carrots for seed, and peppermint for tea and oils that flavor gum, candy and even toothpaste. NUID farmers grow approximately 55% of the U.S. domestic and 45% of the global market carrot variety seed. If you eat a carrot today, it likely originated from a farm in the NUID. As Oregon's second largest irrigation district, NUID is an economic powerhouse. The value of the agricultural industry in Jefferson County, supported by NUID, surpasses that of Crook and Deschutes counties combined.

NUID is at a turning point in its long history. Ongoing dry years, excessive heat, extreme drought, wind, and water shortages has created the perfect storm of a natural disaster. Hydrologic conditions in the region have been so dry for so long that a 100+% snowpack last winter and spring was not enough to resolve ongoing dry conditions. The region was so dry that much of last years snow, and subsequent snowmelt, did not reach regional reservoirs or tributaries but was instead absorbed into the dry soil. In 2021, NUID farmers were allotted as little as 0.50 acre-feet per acre and subsequently ran out of water on August 20 even with the conservative allotment. In addition to drought, fast paced inflation, labor shortages, volatile markets, and increased farm inputs are also contributing to the uncertain times NUID and its farmers face.

Without help, NUID and its farmers have little hope of remaining productive economic drivers of the regional economy as they have been for decades. The States Drought Relief Legislative Package will have a profound effect on the ability of NUID and its farmers to remain solvent while continuing to be a solid economic driver for Oregon and the Central Oregon region all the while ensuring food remains on the tables of homes across the nation and around the world.

Without question, the States Drought Relief Legislative Package is vital to NUID, its farmers and ranchers, and strongly supports the States Drought Relief Legislative Package.

Respectfully submitted, (electronically)
Mike Britton
Executive Manager