March 16, 2021

House Committee On Water
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Testimony: HB 2256

Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Owens and Reardon, and Members of the Committee,

Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is a conservation organization which for more than 35 years has protected Central Oregon’s beautiful forests and high desert, rivers and springs, fish and wildlife, and our vibrant communities. We work to conserve the region’s ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and working rural lands balanced with a responsible, sustainable approach to planning and fostering thriving communities.

LandWatch opposes HB 2256. Bill establishes that perfected and developed water right is not subject to forfeiture if owner of water right ceased to use all or part of water appropriated for period of five successive years because owner engaged in water conservation practices or distribution of water that owner received from water district was less than certificated maximum for period of at least five successive years.

Oregon’s rivers and streams were badly over appropriated by the turn of the 20th century. Changing climate threatens our waterways further. Water rights that have not been used for a period of five successive years for any reason should be returned to the river to address the serious water imbalance that exists today. The waters of Oregon belong to the public, and unused water should be returned to the public.

LandWatch thanks the committee for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition.

Respectfully submitted,

Tod Heisler
Director, Rivers Program
Central Oregon LandWatch