



P.O. Box 232  
Blue River, OR 97413  
(541) 525-1883  
[tim@timlaue.com](mailto:tim@timlaue.com)

---

May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### **Written Testimony to the House Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery**

**To:** Representative Brian Clem, Chair and Members of the Committee

**From:** Tim Laue

**Re:** Testimony in Support of SB 745

---

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tim Laue, and I am a displaced resident from the McKenzie Community of Blue River. I write today in support of SB 745. Until recently I served as Chair of the Blue River Water District but resigned my position because I was unable to do the justice to the responsibilities of that position. District justice. Since Labor Day I have been heavily involved with the efforts of the McKenzie Community Development Corporations efforts to help with emergency response, recovery, and rebuilding in the aftermath of Holiday Farm, but to be clear my testimony in favor is as a community resident and I am not speaking on behalf of any of the organizations with which I am associated.

Havin said that I have been personally involved with the efforts to help develop a black water sanitary system for Blue River since 2015. The need is critical, and the technology has advanced to where I believe a dependable, cost effective, modular, and expandable system could be installed with benefits to the McKenzie River itself, the small community of Blue River, our neighboring unincorporated communities both up and downriver, and to more than 200,000 residents in the Eugene-Springfield Metro area whose source of potable water in the McKenzie River.

It has been a complex, circuitous and tragic path to get to where we are now. You are all aware of the tragedy of the Labor Day 2020 wildfire that devastated so much of the Oregon we love so nothing needs to be said about that. What you may not be aware of is the dedicated work of our elected delegations to both this Legislature and to the United States Congress to try and help achieve this goal, complimented by the dedicated work of the Regional Solutions Team, Lane County, the Eugene Water and Electric Board and McKenzie non-profits and residents as well. That effort has its roots in more than 100 years of folk living along the River, and should we succeed could become potentially a model for other remote communities throughout Oregon without the resources for the larger systems in more populated areas.

Should a prototype in Blue River work as intended, it could also work in other rural communities where there is a concentration of septic systems installed long before current codes were written. Many of those systems are failing: the tanks are failing, the leach lines are failing, and the shallow ground water is near contamination levels of biologicals and nitrates. A sanitary system where effluents are pumped to a community drain-field, and where solids are still deposited into suitable tanks which are pumped as they are now, promises state-wide benefits to rural unincorporated communities. It could allow redevelopment within existing community boundaries, under current codes and eliminate the need for drain-fields on individual properties.

None of this can be accomplished, however, without a Sanitary District and creating such Districts in communities who have been in decline for decades poses almost insurmountable difficulties. Communities that are literally shadows of their former selves. I will not go into the details here, but I am happy to provide them to the Committee or its Members further information should that be your desire.

What I will say is SB 745 would open a door that has been locked without a key for decades. It is unfortunate that it took a crisis of this magnitude to bring it to the fore, but it would allow the formation of Sanitary Districts in some fire devastated areas which could lead to feasibility and engineering studies, applications for available federal and state grants and low-interest loans, and the technical assistance to plan, build, and operate small, environmentally sensitive, modular systems that have a small footprint and affordable for rural folk. It is a small step toward planful economic and community re-development that is so desperately needed in fire devastated communities.

Yet none of that can even be considered without a Sanitary District and SB 745 would help us move past the significant obstacle of forming such a district. It is a small but essential step without which small communities like Blue River will most assuredly become ghost towns like others have become in rural areas—Valsetz in Polk County comes to mind. That would be a sadness for Blue River, which in the early 1900's was the largest community in Lane County (we had a gold mine you see).

I urge you to move Senate Bill 745 forward, with a 'do pass' recommendation onto the House Floor.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this testimony, and I apologize for my technical inadequacies that delayed your proceedings this morning and prevented me from presenting this testimony orally.

Please do not hesitate to reach out should Members or the Committee have questions or wish more information, because as Commissioner Buch and Senator Prozanski noted, I have a wealth of information about this topic.