



WaterWatch of Oregon Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

HB 3092
Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon
By Lisa Brown
Submitted to the House Water Committee
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Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and that groundwater is responsibly managed in order to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's rivers, lakes, wetlands and streams. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch supports HB 3092 (recognizing there may be clarifying amendments).

HB 3092 would establish a cost-share grant program to assist domestic well owners in the Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Area of Concern whose wells are adversely affected by over-allocation and over-pumping of groundwater for irrigation. Such a fund will not solve the significant problems that over-allocation has caused for domestic well owners, but could provide important cost-share assistance to them to help alleviate this extremely challenging situation.

The Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Area of Concern lies within the Harney Basin, composed of four sub-basins whose waters flow to the lakes and wetlands of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (Silvies River, Silver Creek, Donner Und Blitzen and Harney-Malheur Lakes). In 2015, using existing data, OWRD calculated it had over-allocated Harney Basin groundwater by more than 100,000 acre-feet. The Harney Basin Community-Based Water Planning Collaborative, in which WaterWatch is actively engaged, is currently working on tools to help address and stabilize groundwater declines. Those declines also impact groundwater dependent ecosystems, springs, rivers, and lakes and associated fish and wildlife, and irrigators facing well issues and significant pumping reductions. Concurrently, a joint USGS-OWRD Groundwater Study is underway that will provide critical information for next steps in groundwater management.

Based on current understanding—including limited groundwater recharge and very large cones of depression and voids in the aquifer created by over-pumping—declines in domestic wells are expected to continue increasing with additional domestic wells impacted over time, even after implementing reductions in irrigation pumping, raising questions about how people can continue to live on their rural properties. **HB 3092 could provide important assistance to domestic well owners affected by the significant over-allocation of Harney Basin groundwater.**

The Harney Basin situation vividly illustrates the need for better and more complete data (e.g. groundwater studies, monitoring and water use data) and agency capacity and commitment to manage and apply the data—and funding to achieve those—in order to avoid subjecting other basins to the Harney Basin situation.

We urge the Committee to support HB 3092. Thank you for consideration of our testimony.

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