



## **WaterWatch of Oregon** **Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers**

### **HB 4061**

#### **Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon**

**By Kimberley Priestley**

**Submitted to the House Committee on Agriculture, Land and Water**

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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 4061:** WaterWatch supports HB 4061, and the -1 amendments, which would offer expand OWRD enforcement authority slightly, require water statements for hauled water, and increase fines related to cannabis. That said, we did want to register that we are disappointed that the -1 amendments have narrowed the bill so significantly. The bill as drafted was already narrower than the state's needs as far as providing OWRD with authorities to ensure legal use of water for cannabis or otherwise.

With climate change and increased incidents of drought, it is more important than ever that the state has the authorities it needs to ensure legal use of Oregon's surface and groundwaters.

While we appreciate that the illegal use of water for cannabis has caught the attention of legislators, illegal water use is a systemwide problem that is present across the state and is not limited to the single crop of cannabis. Whether someone is diverting or pumping water without a water right at all, using more water than they are allowed under an existing right or not complying with the terms and conditions of their water rights, all these illegal uses of water have an impact on other water users and Oregon's surface and ground waters. Long story short, whether the crop is cannabis or carrots, illegal use impacts other water users and the resource, and the state needs appropriate and effective tools to address it.

While we understand the difficulty in having the larger needed conversation in the short session, we ask for legislative leadership in ensuring that the broader topic of improving and modernizing OWRD's enforcement and toolbox is brought forward in 2023.

In the meantime, we support the modest changes in HB 4061, and the -1 amendments. We urge the Committee to pass this bill.

Thank you for consideration of our testimony.

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