

June 8, 2023

Co- Chair Dembrow, Co-Chair Pham, members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources.

The Association of Oregon Counties is in support of the omnibus water package, HB 2010 with the -6 amendments. Although there are many pieces of this omnibus water bill that I could reference, I would like to direct your attention to three key portions of the proposed amendment.

Place Based Planning, sections 15 and 16 and associated funding found in section 44: The Association of Oregon Counties has been in support of the Place-Based Planning process from the beginning. The opportunity this process has for not only state-local partnerships, but also the benefits that are provided for entire watersheds, regions, and frankly all of Oregon cannot be overstated.

In 2015, OWRD received legislative authority and funding to begin a water planning pilot-phase. In 2016, four locations were identified and began testing the draft planning guidelines. Those four locations were the Upper Grande Ronde Sub-Basin, Lower John Day Sub-Basin, Mid-Coast Region, and the Harney Basin. Each of the four locations approached the Place-Based planning differently, and frankly that was the point. Allow for local communities, basins, and regions, to assess their water needs and identify ways they could address the water issues in their own way.

Currently, the Place Based planning statute is set to sunset on June 30. Sections 15 and 16 of HB 2010-6 as well as the funding components found in this bill, and agency budgets previously passed out, removes that sunset and would establish a permanent Place Based Planning process in statute.

Community Water Supply, sections 24 and 25 as well as the funding allocation found in section 46: This portion of the amendment (originally proposed as HB 3321A) attempts to address the vulnerabilities in local government-regulated small

community water systems. These sections call for a study to look into not only the reliability of a water supply, but also the source of said water quality, infrastructure, drought and floods, water rates, the regulations around safe drinking water, as well as other items of interest. Drinking Water Services contracts with counties to perform much of the program work on small community water systems. Counties are responsible for all water systems with groundwater sources that serve 3,300 people or less.

Small Water Systems serve anywhere from four to fourteen service connections and commercial or public premises used by ten to twenty-four people at least 60 days per year. Counties very much appreciate the assistance in supporting the small community water systems found in this amendment.

Juniper Tree Removal, sections 35-39 as well as the funding allocations in sections 48-50: These sections (originally drafted as HB 3142A) is an attempt to address the increase of Juniper Trees in the dry arid regions of our state. It is a native species to the state but has spread across nine million acres in the past 130 years. Over the past 60 years, Juniper trees have covered 1000% more area than they used to. Mature junipers can have significant impacts on the landscape and consume gallons of water in a single day. Ten juniper trees can consume all the annual precipitation in an area they are located in.

Local governments believe we need to do everything we can to ensure water remains for individuals as well as fish. Juniper removal is a key factor in how to make that happen. Juniper trees drain streams and tributaries and, by causing the area to be so dry, can lead to massive risk of wildfires. One year of active western juniper removal has the potential of increasing stream flows by 225%. Since 2005, the Federal Bureau of Land Management has removed western juniper on 173,000 acres in Oregon. With this program and this allocation, Oregon's counties can help in these efforts.

There are many other aspects in this bill that I could identify as much needed investments to help Oregon Counties address the drought and water scarcity issues they are experiencing; however, I would like to leave you with this:

Counties play an integral role in the water conversation. When a county has drought on the horizon, we are the ones that request a drought declaration form the



state. When a county is wanting to address housing and expansion, without the resources needed, i.e. water, those areas cannot adequately be developed.

County's also have a desire for conservation efforts. Counties will work to ensure the areas identified for conservation are conducted in collaboration with Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

In 2022, 17 of the 36 counties in Oregon received the Governor's Drought Declaration, and in 2021, 26 of the 36 counties received such declarations. With rising temperatures and changing climate, it is anticipated that water scarcity will continue.

The Association of Oregon Counties is in support of HB 2010 and the proposed amendment. We respectfully request an "AYE" vote on this very important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your consideration in this request,

Branden Pursinger
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Association of Oregon Counties