

Representative Ken Helm, Chair  
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

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### **Support of HB3142**

My name is Adam Haarberg, Program Manager for the Jefferson County SWCD. I have been working for the district, more specifically in the Trout Creek Watershed, for almost 25 years. In this time, I have witnessed firsthand how the encroachment and expansion of juniper trees has exacerbated the effects of drought and climate change on our landscapes in central Oregon, which is why I am writing to express my support of HB3142 to remove invading junipers.

Jefferson County receives very little precipitation, with a historic average annual rainfall of 9-10 inches, but the last 4 years have been 5-7 inches annually. To compound this low rainfall, research has shown that it takes a rain event of more than a ½ inch to penetrate the canopy of juniper trees, leaving even less rainfall to reach the soil. On a landscape with 50% juniper cover, this essentially cuts our effective precipitation in half, making it very difficult for our native shrub and grass species to thrive, or even survive, which significantly impacts the wildlife that depends on that forage, not to mention our livestock producers. In January 2023, we received less than 1/3 of an inch for the entire month.

Clearing the juniper canopy allows the rainfall to enter the soil profile, promoting native shrub and grass species while allowing the landscape to capture, store, and safely release water into our springs and streams promoting healthy watershed function. Naturally, this benefits all species that inhabit our watersheds, including humans. One such species we have in the Trout Creek Watershed is ESA listed Summer Steelhead. Trout Creek is the major spawning tributary and largest producer of wild summer steelhead in the Deschutes River basin. With summer steelhead being a species of concern in our area, I have spent most of my career dedicated to their recovery. Partnering with ODFW, we have restored over 14 miles of stream by creating and enhancing instream fish habitat, reconnecting floodplains, and improving and riparian vegetation. Unfortunately, all this great habitat that has been created and protected throughout the watershed doesn't provide the intended benefits to the fish, and multiple other species, without water. This fact has never been more apparent than in the last 4-5 years with the extreme drought conditions. Aquatic and terrestrial species have all suffered. Our streams have been going dry earlier in the summer, with surface flows returning later and later every fall, or even into winter.

Because of the ongoing drought I have shifted my focus from the streams to the uplands. It's been widely documented that healthy uplands are the driving force to healthy streams. The SWCD, with grants from OWEB, have been able to treat over 1,700 acres of privately owned land with juniper encroachment since 2019, with 1,800 acres currently funded to be treated in the immediate future. Our partner agency, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service has joined the effort, designating Trout Creek a Conservation Implementation Strategy, and has focused its attention, to remove junipers in watersheds that drain into steelhead producing streams.

House Bill 3142 will complement these ongoing efforts, and leveraging the funds provided, will allow broader scale treatments on a faster timeline, allowing for watershed wide treatments in the tributaries. This work will provide a key piece to restoring hydrologic processes and returning our uplands to healthy functioning grassland ecosystems. This will in turn, result in restoring the historical stream flow regime that our native species need to flourish. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.