



Board of Commissioners

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Re: Testimony in Support of HB 3163

Chair Helm, co-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water:

Thank you for inviting the perspectives of local governments and other community leaders on the critically important issue of water planning.

As Vice Chair of the Benton County Board of Commissioners and former Executive Director of Marys River Watershed Council, I am writing to express Benton County's strong interest in and support for place-based, integrated water resources planning.

The future of water in Benton County, including the watersheds of the Marys River, the Long Tom, the Alsea, the Luckiamute, and the Willamette, continue to be a top priority for the County, our cities (Adair Village, Albany, Corvallis, Monroe, Philomath) and the broader community. We have a strong interest in conducting a comprehensive regional assessment – planning, vision, and commitment – to conserve, protect, manage, and share our waters as the climate warms in the Willamette Valley.

Rural residential development is where current Benton water resource issues has shown up first. Since Oregon began requiring well testing and log submittal in 2009, about 4-5 wells a year have not produced enough water to support the construction of a single residence. That represents about 7% of the wells over the 12-year period from 2010-2022. We would like to improve our understanding of the extent of our rural water supply challenges, and the implications for future patterns of development.

The Board of Commissioners and Planning Commission identified long-range water planning as a top focus in a joint scoping session last summer. We have had a series of discussions about the potential for shared water infrastructure with our cities, small and large. Next month, we will host the annual Oregon Planners' Network meeting, featuring a panel about water access, security, and quality.

In addition to strong interest and leadership, we need access to technical assistance, financial resources, and dedicated local staff capacity to launch an integrated water resource planning effort. Despite strong Board, staff and community interest in water planning a combination of COVID emergency response, high community demand for planning and building department resources and competing facilities issues have limited our ability to make progress.

We strongly support Oregon's statewide and regional investment in cooperative, community-based planning to meet current and future instream and out-of-stream water needs. If we don't address our knowledge gaps now, and build common understanding of our water resources, we will have a slim chance indeed of equitably sharing these resources in the future.

Thank you for your leadership on this critically important issue.

Respectfully,

BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS