Chairman Helm, Vice Chairs Hartman and Owen. My name is Gary Marshall, founding member and Chairman of High Desert Partnership and also currently serving on the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). As a native Oregonian and a lifelong resident of Harney County, I would like to speak about the value of passing HB3222, from a Rancher/ Landowner perspective.

In Harney basin, native meadows and wetlands are a natural and magnificent result of mountain snowmelt waters spreading over the fertile basin soils during longer days and warming temperatures of spring time. The cycle repeats year after year to replenish the aquifer, provide waterfowl/wildlife habitat, enrich the soil and produce a crop for Ranchers to use as winter livestock feed.

Native meadows are vast in Harney basin, however they are in decline throughout much of the Intermountain west. The conversions of these rich ecosystems to development for higher economic uses, bring about loss to historical practices, ground water, and wildlife.

Maintaining and improve this valuable wet meadow resource, takes an investment of personnel and capital. The growing uncertainty of how much and when mountain snowmelt water reaches the valley makes it even more important to have updated infrastructure in place to utilize water more efficiently and effectively. Added benefit to this water management system, is that there is a minimal energy input requirement from fossil fuel and electricity on an annual basis.

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board recognized the value of investing over 6 million dollars into Harney basin. In January 2016, OWEB Board awarded a “Focused Investment Partnership”(FIP) grant to Harney Basin Wetlands Initiative for work that would set the collaborative group on the path to enhance and preserve function of these critical ecological zones. By continuing to fund important natural wildlife and community enhancement efforts in rural regions of our state, Oregonians are saying that we take seriously, our work toward building a better Oregon.