

Submitted Testimony of Scott White, General Manager
Submitted to the House Committee on Agriculture,
Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

March 27, 2023

RE: KDD SUPPORT FOR HB 2765

Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Hartman and Owens, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water. As some of you know, I have been entrenched in the water issues of the Klamath Basin since I served the State of Oregon as its Watermaster implementing regulation in the Klamath Basin for the first time in history. Since, I have served in roles as Executive Director of the Klamath Water Users Association and currently as the General Manager of the Klamath Drainage District (KDD). I serve on countless committees and boards aimed largely at improving the water issues plaguing our community and our watershed.

The Klamath Drainage District is located on the former lakebed of Lower Klamath Lake. We distribute water to approximately 27,000 acres of farm and ranch ground where we typically grow pasture grass, grass hay, alfalfa, barley, wheat, and potatoes. KDD also provides water to the Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge (LKNWR) which is the first refuge in the country dedicated to migratory waterfowl. Unfortunately, federal management decisions have limited water deliveries to our treasured National Wildlife Refuges including the LKNWR. This has obviously reduced the number of birds that seek rest, feed, and protection in our area, but it has also dried up critical habitat for other, less common species like turtles, muskrats, badgers, coyotes, elk, deer and even the occasional bear.

HB 2765 is a positive, forward-thinking alternative to begin healing the things that are right and good in the Klamath Basin.

HB 2765 will begin to repair a local ecological disaster: As noted above, the LKNWR went dry resulting in countless species of birds, animals, plants and who else knows what to be harmed or impacted greatly. It needs healing and water is the missing ingredient. Unfortunately, there is no way to predict decision making related to federal water. HB 2765 as written would provide a much-needed secure supply of treated water to an otherwise parched ecosystem. Further, the relationship between KDD and the refuge is one of partnership, cooperation, and frequent communication to accomplish restoration in our neighborhood. HB 2765 fits perfectly into the strategies already put in place for the recovery of our local ecosystem.

Good projects make good communities: Klamath Falls is desperately looking for a win. Between the Spotted Owl, and now endangered fisheries, regulations have impacted the growth, prosperity, and happiness of our humble rural community. Further, with the regulations and water issues plaguing our region, it has been incredibly difficult to attract and retain good businesses. HB 2765 provides a smart and financially responsible solution for our community that would otherwise cost \$20M in piping if not enacted. Further, it sends a message that the legislature cares about the Klamath Basin, which is not just good for Klamath County, but also the entire state from an economic perspective related to business recruitment.



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HB 2765 does not harm anyone, or anything: HB 2765 literally enacts the very thing that is already occurring whereas if not enacted, will reduce flows in the river. KDD lives downstream of the South Suburban Sanitary District which has agreed to deliver water to the Lower Klamath Lake Region (where KDD services). With the original plan being to pipe the water at a cost of \$20M, the parties began to seek a reasonable and prudent alternative. HB 2765 is that solution as it does not affect any other party, it does not affect the river by taking this water out to be placed in a pipe, and it will save the community and the districts \$20M in piping costs.

It's time to Win, Win, Win: In summary, HB 2765 is a win on multiple accounts.

1. HB 2765 is a forward-thinking solution to land application within our parched region. It begins to put water on much needed land and reserves other valuable water resources for other uses (i.e. agriculture, fisheries, sustainable lake levels, etc.).
2. HB 2765 saves the district's, its customers, and our community \$20M in piping costs. These are funds this community cannot afford at this time.
3. HB 2765 puts water in smart places. SSSD has been seeking opportunities to reuse its effluent on working lands for nearly a decade. Investments are being made to do just that. HB 2765 provides the district the opportunity to maximize the effectiveness of this resource by putting the water instream and eventually to working lands and the refuge. This is a double benefit compared to most, if not all, water reuse programs as both of these lands are equally essential to the habitat wildlife of every species rely on.
4. **HB 2765 will put a feather in the legislature's cap.** For all the reasons above, I hope you can see the countless benefits HB 2765 provides for my community. I firmly believe the legislature does not want to turn its back on Klamath County and wants to be a strong and forward-thinking partner to begin to solve some of the water issues we face. This is a tremendous start that has no negative impact. Where else can you approve an incredible concept with such wide-ranging benefits for a small Oregon community and the environment without spending any money to achieve? In fact, you can accomplish all of this AND save \$20 million.

I genuinely thank you for your attention and consideration to this extremely important bill. For all of the reasons above, I respectfully request that the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water **support HB 2765 as proposed.**

Respectfully submitted,

Scott White
General Manager