



**OREGON
WILD**

Protecting Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and waters since 1974.

www.oregonwild.org

Date: March 28, 2023

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

RE: HB 2765 - Undermining Klamath salmon, water restoration

Testimony of Oregon Wild, Steve Pedery, Conservation Director

Oregon Wild is a state-based conservation organization that is dedicated to protecting and restoring Oregon's wildlands and wildlife as an enduring legacy. For nearly 50 years we have worked to protect the wildlands, wildlife, and waters that make our state such a special place. A special focus of our organization has been the protection and restoration of the national wildlife refuges of the Klamath Basin, and the fish and wildlife that depend upon Upper Klamath Lake and the Klamath River.

Oregon Wild opposes HB 2765 because it would undermine efforts to protect imperiled salmon in the Klamath River while providing no benefit to wetlands and wildlife.

HB 2765 would legislatively allow the South Suburban Sanitary District (SSSD) to reduce the amount of water flowing into the Klamath River. It would do so by granting the exclusive use of reclaimed water---water that is currently discharged into the Klamath system--to the district to use or sell. The bill would exempt the district from current laws governing reclaimed water without any consideration to the harmful effect this would have on the health of the Klamath River, its fisheries, or the communities that depend on them.

At a time when Oregon's ocean salmon fishing industry is facing an unprecedented closure due in part to the collapse of Klamath River chinook, legislation that would further undermine the health of the river makes absolutely no sense. Klamath River salmon runs have declined due to low water flows resulting from irrigation diversions in its headwaters, to poor water quality driven by loss of wetlands and agricultural run-off, and from dams that block access to habitat and exacerbate water quality problems.

A core component of federal and state salmon recovery efforts is increasing water flows in the

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Klamath River. Yet **HB 2765 specifically prohibits use of this water to meet state or federal salmon recovery goals.**

Some have claimed that HB 2765 would benefit national wildlife refuges in the Klamath Basin. As an organization that has advocated for Klamath Basin refuges and wildlife for decades, we find this argument disingenuous. Nothing in the legislation requires SSSD to provide any water to the refuges. It is far more likely that this water—which is currently providing a benefit to fish and wildlife as it flows into the Klamath River—would instead be diverted and sold to the highest bidder.

HB 2765 is a deeply flawed legislative proposal that should be rejected. At a time when Oregon's coastal fishing communities are facing severe economic hardship due partly to the collapse of Klamath River salmon runs, it makes no sense to make matters worse by allowing more water to be diverted from the Klamath River.

Oregon Wild urges the members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water to reject HB 2765.