

Wood River District Improvement Company

Fort Klamath, Oregon

31 March 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Chair Ken Helm,
Vice-Chair Mark Owens,
Vice-Chair Annessa Hartman,
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Owens, Vice-Chair Hartman, and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Wood River District Improvement Company in Fort Klamath to express strong support for House Bill 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package proposed by Representative Helm and Representative Owens. I particularly want to highlight the importance of provisions that provide match funding for irrigation districts to unlock federal dollars for irrigation modernization projects and help districts like ours be more resilient to drought and water scarcity.

To implement large-scale, multi-benefit projects to modernize irrigation infrastructure and be more resilient to drought, The Wood River District Improvement Company (WRDIC) is utilizing federal programs such as EPA Community Grants. These programs play a key role in planning, designing, and implementing projects, but still require some portion of project funding to come from non-federal sources. Our district is committed to modernizing our system, but we require state funding to meet match requirements for implementing identified projects in 2023-2025 and beyond. House Bill 3124 contains the match funding districts need to fully utilize and leverage the infrastructure dollars that the federal government has made available.

WRDIC, an Oregon non-profit, oversees the irrigation for 6,500 acres using water from both wells and the Wood River. Our district is at the top of the straw in the Klamath and the water source for all irrigation below Klamath Lake and the Klamath Federal Refuge. WRDIC is currently undertaking a significant water quality improvement and irrigation modernization project using a quilt fabric of federal, state, and our members funds. The District is currently working with the EPA and has secured a grant from OWEB. In both cases, matching funds are required and in both cases, these funds are anticipated to cover 1/3rd of the total project costs. WRDIC is focused on raising every available grant to finish what we anticipate being a model of updating irrigation practices from the 1890s to modern usage, recirculating phosphorite rich water back to the land allowing clean water to be used by our downstream neighbors, and building infrastructure the district can rely on for the next 100 years, even during low water years. We are very optimistic about making these changes if our state and federal partners help us cross many of the financial hurdles.

Oregon has faced several years of severe droughts, including some of the worst on record, and the detrimental impacts are being felt throughout the state, including in our region. Without access to reliable water deliveries, farmers are unable to grow crops and produce the food and fiber that we all rely on. This not only affects our economy, but also our food security and, especially in rural

communities, our way of life. While we are experiencing our first “real” winter in the past five years, it still will not be enough to get us back to level after years of drought. Our project is a big step forward for drought resiliency and state help with federal match dollars helps makes this a reality.

I urge you to support the important funding components in HB 3124 and ensure that state match funding for irrigation modernization projects remains a part of the final bill. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jason A. Atkinson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Jason A. Atkinson
Wood River District Improvement Company
State Senator 2000-20013
State Representative 1998-2000