



April 3, 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 Klamath Drainage District (KDD) 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.

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. Much of the infrastructure that the district relies on is nearly 100 years old, inefficient, and increasingly expensive to annually operate and maintain. The modernization projects that the district is pursuing will allow for improved efficiency, better accountability, and increased distribution to our parched refuges.

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. Additionally, these droughts impact our fish and wildlife. The very food we grow on KDD is also an important fuel for the migrating birds of our Pacific Flyway.

In order to implement large-scale, multi-benefit projects to modernize irrigation infrastructure and be more resilient to drought, many districts, including ours, have utilized federal programs such as NRCS's Watershed & Flood Prevention Operations or Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART for support. 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. Bill 3124 contains the match funding districts need to fully utilize and leverage the infrastructure dollars that the federal government has made available.



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I respectfully 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,

Scott White, General Manager