

February 25, 2024

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Central Oregon LandWatch Testimony on SB 427 – Support

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 427. Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is an Oregon non-profit, public interest organization of about 950 members. Its offices are located in Bend, Oregon. LandWatch’s mission is to defend and plan for Central Oregon’s livable future, and it has advocated for the preservation of natural resources in Central Oregon for over 30 years.

LandWatch strongly supports SB 427, a fix designed to protect our rivers and streams.

In the Deschutes Basin, surface water rights were fully allocated by 1913. Current water supply assessments for the Upper Deschutes Basin highlight an alarming median annual shortfall of 135,000 acre-feet, which can increase to 350,000 acre-feet in dry years.¹ During these dry years, our rivers and creeks bear the brunt of the shortages, experiencing significant disruptions in flow and temperature.

With no new surface water to allocate, and significant water scarcity challenges, water right transfers are one of the primary pathways available to address water demands in the Basin. In reallocating old water rights to new uses, we must ensure we do not further diminish stream flows.

By targeting a specific loophole that currently allows water right transfers to bypass environmental review, SB 427 is an important step forward in safeguarding the ecological integrity of our waterways. I urge you to support SB 427.

Sincerely,

¹ Bureau of Reclamation. 2019. *Upper Deschutes River Basin Study*. Prepared in partnership with Oregon Water Resource Department and Basin Study Work Group.





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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeremy Austin".

Jeremy Austin
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We defend and plan for Central Oregon's livable future