



March 13, 2025

Representative Ken Helm, Co-Chair
Representative Mark Owens, Co-Chair
Representative Sarah Finger McDonald, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Re: TU and WSC oppose HB 3544-2

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited and Wild Salmon Center oppose HB 3544-2 and instead recommend a facilitated and balanced workgroup during the interim.

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a nonprofit dedicated to conserving coldwater fish such as trout, salmon, and steelhead, and their habitats. Wild Salmon Center (WSC) is a nonprofit organization that works to protect and restore healthy forests, abundant clean water, and thriving wild salmon populations across the state and the Pacific Rim.

TU and WSC have significant concerns about HB 3544-2, a bill that would make major changes to the process for reviewing decisions of the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD). We oppose HB 3544-2 because it:

- increases the burden for non-applicants representing public interests to file, prepare and present their cases, which hobbles efforts to ensure integrated and sustainable management of Oregon's water resources;
- restricts important due process rights that have evolved over many years to ensure complex water decisions can be thoroughly understood by the parties and the neutral factfinder; and
- doesn't solve the problem it aims to address: the backlog of contested cases.

As representatives from water-user groups have agreed, the contested case backlog results primarily from the time it takes OWRD to refer a contested case to the Office of Administrative Hearings, not the time it takes to resolve a contested case after it is referred. The backlog therefore is not a justification for the significant changes being proposed to the contested case process, especially if it comes at the expense of due process for parties who may disagree with proposed agency actions.

For the above reasons, we oppose HB 3544-2. Instead, we suggest a facilitated and balanced interim work group to more fully address the issues raised by the bill.

Thank you for considering our testimony.

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