



WaterWatch of Oregon

Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

SB 634

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon
Kimberley Priestley
Senate Committee on Energy and the Environment
March 17, 2025

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's rivers, lakes and streams. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch opposes SB 634

SB 634 would allow all hydropower to be used to meet Oregon's Renewable Energy Portfolio standard (RPS). This would allow old hydroelectric dams, such as those on the Columbia River, that have had devastating impacts on fisheries to count as "renewable".

Under current law, old hydroelectric dams can count towards Oregon's RPS but only if the electricity is attributable to post 1995 efficiency upgrades or if it is certified as low impact hydro. This bill would gut those sideboards and allow hydro on all dams and diversions to count as "renewable". Importantly, by allowing old, fish-killing hydro projects to count under the RPS, this bill would defeat a central purpose of the RPS—incentivizing innovative and forward-looking renewable energy projects. Oregon also allows hydro from new dams and diversion to count towards RPS, but only outside of protected areas. This bill would gut the provisions regarding protected areas.

Rather than try to weaken RPS standards, Oregon should take this opportunity to strengthen them. At the time Oregon enacted its RPS standards, standards in Washington, Montana and California, prohibited hydropower from new dams or diversions from being counted as renewable under their RPS programs, as it is recognized that doing such provides an incentive to build new dams and diversions. In contrast, Oregon RPS standards allow new dams, except in some protected areas, to be counted in meeting RPS. Federal, state, local and private interests have spent millions upon millions of dollars towards river restoration in Oregon. Oregon should take a leadership role and strip from our RPS laws the allowance for hydropower at new dams and diversions to stop incentivizing projects that put at risk Oregon's rivers, fisheries and the many economies that depend upon them.

This bill not only doesn't address current problems with Oregon's RPS allowances with regards to hydropower, but would set things backwards.

In closing, we urge the committee to vote no on SB 634.

Contact: Kimberley Priestley, Water Watch of Oregon, kjp@waterwatch.org, 503-295-4039 x 107

WaterWatch of Oregon
Main Office: 213 SW Ash St. Suite 208 Portland, OR 97204
Southern Oregon Office: PO Box 261, Ashland, OR, 97520

www.waterwatch.org
Main Office: 503.295.4039
S. OR Office: 541.708.0048