

County Commissioners  
Danielle Bethell, Chair  
Colm Willis  
Kevin Cameron



Chief Administrative  
Officer  
Jan Fritz

## MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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March 24, 2025

Chair Senator Jeff Golden  
Vice-Chair Senator Todd Nash  
Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

### **RE: Support for Senate Bill 1189 – North Santiam Canyon Wastewater Project**

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

The Marion County Board of Commissioners writes to express our strong support for Senate Bill 1189, which is essential to the timely delivery of the North Santiam Canyon Wastewater Project and the preservation of \$50 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding awarded by the Oregon Legislature through SR 2240.

The goal of SB 1189 is simple yet critical: to allow construction of the North Santiam Canyon Wastewater Project to begin while the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) continues the process of resolving the regulatory conflict between the Three Basin Rule and the Clean Water Act in the wake of the Supreme Court's Maui decision. This bill does not exempt the project from any permitting standards or environmental protections. Instead, it includes strong safeguards that ensure the project complies fully with all applicable laws and regulations. It will not allow any discharge until DEQ issues the appropriate NPDES permit.

Without the ability to begin construction by June 2025, Marion County and its partners risk losing a \$50 million investment in wildfire recovery, rural infrastructure, and environmental stewardship. If we are unable to meet the December 31, 2026 ARPA expenditure deadline, those federal dollars will be returned unused, an outcome that would be deeply harmful to our rural communities and to the broader goals of economic recovery and resilience.

The North Santiam Canyon Wastewater Project is one of the most important regional infrastructure efforts in the Willamette Valley. It will replace outdated septic systems with a modern, state-of-the-art wastewater treatment facility serving the cities of Gates, Mill City, aiding recovery in an area by the devastating 2020 wildfires. This project supports wildfire recovery, protects water quality in the North Santiam River Basin, and enhances public health and environmental outcomes for downstream users, including the City of Salem.

Moreover, the project will unlock new opportunities for housing development, economic growth, and long-term sustainability in an area that continues to struggle with rebuilding. At a time when Oregon faces an acute housing crisis, this project is a model for how state and federal

investments can work together to support rural communities and prepare for future environmental and economic challenges.

SB 1189 strikes the right balance between maintaining Oregon's strong environmental protections and enabling practical, time-sensitive action to serve vulnerable communities. We respectfully urge the Committee to advance this bill with the emergency clause and ensure that construction can proceed in time to preserve federal funding and deliver real results for the North Santiam Canyon.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued support of wildfire recovery and community resilience efforts across Oregon.

Sincerely,



Danielle Bethell  
Chair



Colm Willis  
Commissioner



Kevin Cameron  
Commissioner