



4145 NE Cully Blvd., Portland, OR, 97630

April 7, 2025

To: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

Subject: Verde Support for Senate Bill 1154-1

SB 1154 represents a long overdue and critical update to Oregon's Groundwater Quality Management Act. For too long, communities, particularly rural communities and communities of color, have borne the burden of groundwater contamination with little to no knowledge, no tools, and no voices in the decisions that impact the safety of their drinking water.

Many Oregonians don't even know what's in their water. There are families relying on contaminated wells for drinking, cooking, and bathing. There are entire neighborhoods without the resources or information to test their water, let alone advocate for solutions. These are communities that have been historically overlooked and excluded from decision making processes, and unless we act, they will continue to be harmed.

At Verde, we have engaged with community members in every county in Oregon through our partnership with the Oregon Water Futures Collaborative. What we've learned is clear: people want clean water, and they want to be part of the solution. They are ready to engage—what they need is a process that includes and respects their voices.

SB 1154 gives us the opportunity to address that.

This bill does not expand agency power—it clarifies responsibilities. It makes sure agencies are working from a shared playbook, with clear roles, timelines, and expectations for action. But what makes SB 1154 stand out, and what Verde especially supports, is its prioritization of community outreach and engagement.

It outlines a process that includes community perspectives from the start. It provides outreach to people who live in and rely on groundwater management areas of concern—many of whom have struggled to engage before. It ensures that community advisory committees are not just symbolic, but functional and informed. It recognizes that the people most affected by groundwater contamination are the ones who need to be heard—and that solutions must reflect their realities.



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We are glad to see the clear responsibilities for agencies in the bill, as they are essential to ensure that no community falls through the cracks. When roles are undefined or overlapping, critical issues like groundwater contamination can linger for years without resolution. SB 1154 eliminates that confusion by outlining who is responsible for what—and when—so agencies can act more efficiently and communities can know who to turn to. Clarity in roles also supports better coordination, reduces delays, and increases public trust in the process.

Importantly, this structured approach is paired with a continued role for the local advisory committee, now with clearer guidance and a stronger connection to the decision-making process. This partnership ensures that agencies are not operating in a vacuum. Instead, they are working with community representatives who bring local knowledge, lived experience, and accountability to the table. When agency responsibilities are clearly defined and grounded in real community input, the system becomes more transparent, more responsive, and more effective for everyone.

Environmental justice means more than just addressing pollution; it means designing processes that empower communities. It means asking, listening, and partnering with the people on the ground. SB 1154 helps fulfill that promise.

At Verde, we've seen what's possible when frontline communities are given the tools, information, and space to lead. We've seen how local knowledge and lived experience can improve environmental outcomes and create real, lasting change. This bill takes an important step in that direction.

We urge you to pass SB 1154—not only to protect Oregon's groundwater, but to protect the communities that depend on it.

Thank you,
Cheyenne Holliday, Verde