

Submitter: Ronald Larson
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1153

My name is Ronald Larson, and I live in McMinnville, OR. I am a retired Certified Water Rights Examiner (CWRE) in the State of Oregon. As such, when I was active as a CWRE, I had previously worked on several water rights transfers. After reviewing the proposed language of SB 1153, I identify several potential problems with this bill. The water rights transfer process is vitally important to farmers throughout the State of Oregon. In my opinion, the proposed bill would further and unnecessarily restrict the existing water rights process.

SB 1153 proposes the most sweeping changes to Oregon water law in decades without clear evidence of a problem. The bill threatens our farmers' last remaining tool (water right transfers) for efficient water management, including adaptation to climate change, making irrigation system improvements, addressing drought, and adjusting to changing market conditions. Our farmers face these very real challenges.

SB 1153 authorizes the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to deny or condition a water right transfer if it "may result" in unidentified impacts to fish habitat or water quality in most stream reaches. Such vague language does not belong in any of our state laws and administrative rules.

SB 1153 is not ready for adoption. A longer and more thoughtful dialogue is needed. More thorough, thoughtful public participation is needed. The state should pursue a collaborative, science-based effort. This bill requires significant collaborative effort to address the potential problems that will arise from it. I am opposed to SB 1153 as currently written.