

September 8, 2025

To the Water Resources Commission;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding the forthcoming voluntary agreements for Blitzen-Voltage area. As requested by the Commission, we will not remark upon the specific policy proposals contained in the Division 512 rules, the place-based integrated water resources plan for our community, or the Department's guidance for voluntary agreements. We understand that our comments on those topics are not invited and will not be considered by the Commission at this time. Instead, we will take this opportunity to share information with you about our efforts to develop voluntary agreements to sustainably manage groundwater in the Blitzen-Voltage area of the Harney Basin.

Most importantly we want to inform you that we anticipate bringing voluntary agreements before the Commission in December for a decision consistent with ORS 537.745 and intend to coordinate with the Department prior to that. Since this process has never been done before, we wanted to make you aware of our intentions well in advance of asking you to make a decision. We look forward to working with the Department and Commission to ensure that you have sufficient information upon which to base your decision.

First, we would like to provide a little bit of information about who we are since we have not previously had the opportunity to speak to the Commission directly. We are here as representatives of groundwater users in our area, but it is important to note that we are working collectively on a voluntary agreement with other groundwater users and no single person can effectively speak on behalf of all of us. We take this responsibility seriously and need to be mindful of not speaking or making commitments for other groundwater users in our area.

My name is Jacob Davis and I have lived in the Donner Blitzen for 47 years – my whole life. I'm a third generation farmer in the Donner Und Blitzen area. my grandpa come to the Donner Blitzen in the 50s and he raised my dad and his siblings. My dad has lived here in the Donner Blitzen for 70 years – his whole life. My parents went out on their own in 1997 instead of being in the partnership with my grandpa and my uncle. He started developing where they currently live, my wife and I come back to work for my parents in 2002 and in 2012 we went out on our own and started developing from scratch. I am the father of four kids that I would like to pass our place on to. My parents would also like to keep their farm in our family. I've been married to my wife for 21 years now. We help out in kids ministry because our faith is very important to us. I also serve on the Crane grade school board and I am involved in helping out with 4-H and the youth livestock show in our county, all four of

our kids are involved with 4-H and the youth livestock show and they're all four involved with the day-to-day operations on our farm and our ranch. We are irrigating around 1000 acres between hay ground and irrigated pasture pivots with ground water , my parents are a little bigger than we are ,our children help us put up pay farm and work cows we rely on our children real heavily, especially in the summertime. I said I was a third generation farmer rancher in the Donner Blitzen, but I'm actually a fourth generation farmer rancher total my great granddad ranch in Idaho ,It is not a job for us. It's a livelihood at least that's what it is for my dad and for me, when you asked me when I was a little kid what I wanted to be I wanted to be just like my dad I wanted to farm and Ranch. I'm getting to live out my dreams. I'm really hoping that Whatever four of my kids wanna come back or if they all want to. come back they will get the same opportunity to live their dream like I have

I am Erick Keerins, a 4th generation rancher's son who grew up in Izee, Oregon on a century farm established in 1886 in Grant County. My wife, Christy, is a 3rd generation USA farmer's daughter who grew up in Terrebonne, Oregon. In 2018, we purchased property in Princeton, Blitzen-Voltage area with the intention of settling down, starting a second career and establishing some roots near family. Due to being Active Duty Coast Guard, we moved about every two years on average and wanted to establish a home for our children, place to come back to with lasting memories, connection and a connection to a rural small community. In 2021, after 22 years of service, I retired from the US Coast Guard and began working along with my wife and six children to fulfill the dreams and goals we had established. We raise hay, cows, pasture pigs, chickens and other livestock. I have not been as involved in the community as Christy, due to dedicating majority of my time to establishing fields, building a home, and all associated home base operation infrastructure. I support Christy in her endeavors as small animal 4-H leader, 4-H livestock committee member, Food Systems member, and local raw milk producer. She participates in the local Hines and Burns farmers markets, Fall/Christmas bazars and is active with the Chamber of Commerce events sponsored though out the year.

My name is Erik Steen and my wife Laura and son Aksel run and operate on my wife's 5th generation family farm/ranch in the Diamond and Princeton area. The ranch was established in the 1890's and is a listed century farm. We are in our late 30's and have taken over the operation with all the expenses 5 years ago. Just last year we purchased two more pivots in the Blitzen area. My wife is a valued employee of the Harney district hospital, in the surgery department. My son is a first grader in Diamond elementary school. As a family operation we raise hay and cattle. Last year I was awarded young farmer/rancher of the year by the Harney County chamber of commerce. We, as a family, greatly appreciate the land and its resources. We work tirelessly to apply conservation methods wherever is needed and preventively to insure a strong ecological foundation for the next generation.

We appreciate your time and effort, and we will always remain stewards of the land and water resources.

Groundwater in our portion of the basin is primarily recharged through the Donner Und Blitzen River, precipitation and snowpack on the Steens mountain, and tributaries from the southern portion of the basin. Our groundwater is distinct from the groundwater recharging the Silvies, Northeast-Crane, Silver Creek, and Weaver Springs portions of the basin and the geology, well yield, water chemistry, and groundwater levels are different from other parts of the basin. Our area comprises the “southern region” of the USGS groundwater budget study. We still have many questions about groundwater sources and flow paths in our part of the basin and we look forward to partnering with the Department and other scientific experts to answer these outstanding questions.

For nearly a decade the Department has been expressing interest in voluntary joint action with groundwater users in our basin, including in areas where groundwater levels are reasonably stable, like the Blitzen-Voltage area. ORS 537.525 states a preference for voluntary joint action between the Commission and groundwater users. It is with knowledge of that statutory preference that we are embarking on this important effort. As a reminder for all of us, the Department and Commission have the responsibility to adhere to and achieve the following substantive goals contained in ORS 537.525:

1. Provision be made for the final determination of relative rights to appropriate ground water everywhere within this state and of other matters with regard thereto through a system of registration, permits and adjudication.
2. Rights to appropriate ground water and priority thereof be acknowledged and protected, except when, under certain conditions, the public welfare, safety and health require otherwise.
3. Beneficial use without waste, within the capacity of available sources, be the basis, measure and extent of the right to appropriate ground water.
4. All claims to rights to appropriate ground water be made a matter of public record.
5. Adequate and safe supplies of ground water for human consumption be assured, while conserving maximum supplies of ground water for agricultural, commercial, industrial, thermal, recreational and other beneficial uses.
6. The location, extent, capacity, quality and other characteristics of particular sources of ground water be determined.
7. Reasonably stable ground water levels be determined and maintained.
8. Depletion of ground water supplies below economic levels, impairment of natural quality of ground water by pollution and wasteful practices in connection with ground water be prevented or controlled within practicable limits.

9. Whenever wasteful use of ground water, impairment of or interference with existing rights to appropriate surface water, declining ground water levels, alteration of ground water temperatures that may adversely affect priorities or impair the long-term stability of the thermal properties of the ground water, interference among wells, thermal interference among wells, overdrawing of ground water supplies or pollution of ground water exists or impends, controlled use of the ground water concerned be authorized and imposed under voluntary joint action by the Water Resources Commission and the ground water users concerned whenever possible, but by the commission under the police power of the state except as specified in ORS 537.796 (Rules regarding low temperature geothermal appropriations), when such voluntary joint action is not taken or is ineffective.
10. Location, construction, depth, capacity, yield and other characteristics of and matters in connection with wells be controlled in accordance with the purposes set forth in this section.
11. All activities in the state that affect the quality or quantity of ground water shall be consistent with the goal set forth in ORS 468B.155 (State goal to prevent ground water contamination).

Groundwater users in our area assembled for the first time in May to talk about and work on voluntary agreements and have met two times since then. Most of the groundwater users in our area had not heard of voluntary agreements before we met in May. Prior to April of this year most of us had the expectation that the Department would not propose regulation in our area based on existing data, previous communications between Department staff, and what was communicated publicly in meetings. The process has been difficult to follow, but we believe that we can bring a cohesive and cooperative strategy with the support of groundwater users in our area.

What we intend to bring to you in December is a voluntary agreement for the Blitzen-Voltage area, or the “southern region” as it is called in the USGS groundwater budget report. We will detail how these voluntary agreements are consistent with state law and policy and how they will contribute to a truly integrated and coordinated approach that achieves the substantive goals of the Commission and Department. Most groundwater users in our area were not consulted in the drafting of the voluntary agreement guidance, but we will refrain from speaking about the contents of the guidance as requested. We understand that this is a new opportunity for Oregon and there are a lot of questions about how this will work.

We sincerely look forward to partnering with the Commission and Department to maintain reasonably stable groundwater levels, balance different beneficial uses of groundwater, and ensure perpetual use of the Blitzen-Voltage groundwater reservoir. We sincerely believe that voluntary joint action with the Commission will ensure consistency with state law and policy, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, the place-based integrated water resources plan, and the Department's new strategic plan. The forthcoming voluntary agreements will foster a cooperative approach with groundwater users and will lead towards a truly integrated and coordinated approach for sustainable and adaptive groundwater management in the Blitzen-Voltage groundwater reservoir. We hope to become a model for other parts of the state and across the West.

Attached to these comments are the following documents:

- A “situation assessment” assessing the possibility of developing voluntary agreements for the Blitzen-Voltage drainage area;
- The results of the independent assessment of the opportunities and barriers for voluntary agreements, including a review by legal professionals about key policy questions.

Sincerely,

Jacob Davis

Erick Keerins

Erik Steen