

April 2, 2024

Laura Hartt
Oregon Water Resources Department
725 Summer Street NE, Suite A
Salem, Oregon 97301



via email: WRD_DL_rule-coordinator@water.oregon.gov

RE: Please Deny OWRD's Proposed Groundwater Allocation Rules

Dear Ms. Hartt,

As a Registered Geologist in Oregon with a well-established practice focused on hydrogeology and water rights, I am very concerned about the groundwater allocation rules proposed by the Oregon Water Resources Department. Although certain areas in Oregon have experienced groundwater declines negatively affecting water users, this is not the case for all areas in the state. The proposed rules will create an effective moratorium on new groundwater use in the State, even in areas that have no issues with groundwater over-use. This approach is extreme, does not balance economic use with sustainability, and will create an unnecessary cap on future growth and development in Oregon.

The Department needs to take a more targeted approach to groundwater management. Oregon already has basin plans for surface-water basins and some groundwater sources. The Department should develop groundwater budgets for each major hydrologic basin as authorized by HB 2018 (2021) and create regulations in the basin plans that address these hydrologic conditions. The Department can concurrently prioritize basins that are most at risk for groundwater over-drafting so the State and water users can avoid future negative consequences.

The Department has adequate authority to address current groundwater concerns while it studies the hydrogeologic systems and creates regulations unique to each basin. The Department can designate "serious water management problem areas" to prevent further demand where it is justified while the groundwater budgets and new rules are developed. Applications can continue to be denied in areas where groundwater is known to be over-drafted and/or new uses will injure existing water rights. The Department should use the tools it already has in a more effective way to better manage groundwater resources.

In summary, the Oregon Water Resources Commission **should reject** the proposed groundwater allocation rules and require the Department to study each hydrologic basin (as it is already required to do by law), and then develop regulations, **as needed on a basin-by-basin basis**, to address any identified groundwater issues. Thank you for your careful consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

SKOOKUM WATER ASSOCIATES INC.

Steven R. Bruce, RG, CWRE
Principal Hydrogeologist

cc (via email): Oregon Representative Ken Helm; Oregon Representative Mark Owens; Geoffrey Huntington, Senior Natural Resources Advisor to Governor Kotek; Tammy Denee, Oregon Cattlemen's Association; April Snell, Oregon Water Resources Congress.