

HARTT Laura A * WRD

From: beachbettyhl@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Heather Morijah
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Sent: Monday, May 13, 2024 2:36 PM
To: WRD_DL_rule-coordinator
Subject: Approve sustainable groundwater rules that protect Oregon wildlife

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Dear Water Policy Analyst Laura Hartt,

Improving Oregon's Groundwater Management rules is of utmost importance to my family and me, particularly as our region faces an ever-increasing demand for groundwater and the intensifying effects of climate change. *We support the Oregon Water Resources Department's proposed rule changes* which provide an important, positive step toward preventing further degradation of Oregon's overallocated groundwater systems.

Our state's existing rules for issuing new groundwater permits have resulted in an over-issuance of those permits: this has caused major groundwater-level declines across the state, which harm rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and springs that rely upon inputs of cold, clean groundwater. This, in turn, harms groundwater-dependent ecosystems and the many freshwater species which live in them. Declining groundwater levels have also negatively impacted existing surface-water rights, including instream water rights for fish and other wildlife and domestic well owners who rely on groundwater for drinking and household use.

There are several important ways that the Department's proposed rules will put Oregon on an improved, more responsible path to groundwater sustainability:

- First, the proposed rules define "reasonably stable" groundwater levels and prevent new groundwater permits from being issued when groundwater levels aren't reasonably stable.
- Second, the proposed rules establish the amount and type of data needed to determine whether groundwater levels are reasonably stable, and they require denial of a permit application if that data isn't available.
- Third and finally, the proposed rules protect senior surface-water rights-- including instream water rights for fish and other wildlife--by requiring a full accounting of the impacts of proposed pumping on hydraulically connected rivers and streams.

Despite these changes being necessary, however, the proposed rules *don't go far enough* to address the current issues of Oregon's overallocated groundwater systems. In many areas around our state, groundwater levels are falling at unsustainable rates. While the proposed rules prevent that rate of decline from worsening, they do nothing to slow or stop the current rate of decline--nor do they address issues with current permits or permit applications in process prior to the rules' adoption.

Oregon's groundwater rules *must go further* to protect groundwater-dependent ecosystems and wildlife. In addition to considering whether groundwater sources are hydrologically connected to streams and rivers, the Department must adopt rules that consider *groundwater's connectivity* to other water features like springs, wetlands and fens that could also be affected by pumping. These ecosystems provide important habitat for an amazing array of wildlife and plants that are increasingly at risk due to their interdependent connection to groundwater, the levels of which have been declining statewide for decades due to outdated permitting rules.

Improving how our state issues new groundwater permits is long overdue, and these proposed rule changes must be implemented promptly to prevent further worsening of a severely damaged system. Adopting the proposed rules is the

bare minimum that Oregon should do to improve sustainable groundwater management for its residents and wildlife who depend on these important water sources.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,
Heather Morijah
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