May 26, 2022

Tom Byler, Director  
Oregon Water Resources Department  
725 Summer Street NE, Suite A  
Salem, OR 97301  

Mike Britton, Executive Manager  
North Unit Irrigation District  
2024 NW Beech St,  
Madras, OR 977441

Courtney Crowell, Water Policy Advisor  
Office of Governor Kate Brown  
900 Court Street, Suite 254  
Salem, OR 97301

Craig Horrell, President  
Deschutes Basin Board of Control  
2024 NW Beech St,  
Madras, OR 977441

RE: Critical water needs in the Deschutes Basin

Director Byler, Ms. Crowell, Mr. Britton, and Mr. Horrell:

As bipartisan legislators committed to a sustainable water future for all Oregonians, we would like to express our appreciation for your leadership in the field of water resources. As you know, our shared resources are increasingly strained by significant pressures such as persistent drought, with serious impacts to communities across the state.

It has come to our attention that a proposal has been made on temporary water right transfer T-13703, which would enable one party to provide 560 acre-feet of water to benefit the extreme need for irrigation water in North Unit Irrigation District. Recognizing growing public interest in this area, measures such as this proposal have the potential to free up significant volumes of water. We as state legislators encourage the Water Resources Department and irrigation districts to seek creative ways to facilitate water sharing that respond to the unique and dire need for water in the Deschutes Basin this irrigation season.

We understand that existing statutes and administrative rules on water transfers will govern actions for this season, but we stand ready to support water sharing that can help keep farmers in business during severe drought while at the same time honoring the Habitat Conservation Plan that the basin has adopted for the protection of fish and wildlife. We look forward to making continued progress together as we navigate the serious water challenges that confront us.

Sincerely,

Representative Ken Helm, Chair  
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, and Water  
House District 34 – Washington County

Representative Mark Owens, Vice-Chair  
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, and Water  
House District 60 – Baker, Grant, Harney, Malheur, and part of Lake County
Representative Vikki Breese-Iverson  
House Republican Leader  
House District 55 – Prineville

Senator Tim Knopp  
Senate Republican Leader  
Senate District 27 – Bend

Representative Daniel Bonham, Vice-Chair  
House Committee on Business & Labor  
House District 59 – The Dalles

Senator Lynn Findley, Vice-Chair  
Senate Committee on Energy & Environment  
Senate District 30 – Baker, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Malheur, Wasco, Wheeler and parts of Clackamas, Deschutes, Lake and Marion Counties

Representative Jason Kropf, Vice-Chair  
House Committee on Economic Development & Prosperity  
House District 54 – Bend