

TESTIMONY

NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER, WILDLIFE, AND FISHERIES

OCTOBER 8, 2024

REDMOND, OR

I would like to thank Congresswomen Lori Chavez-Deremer and Congressman Cliff Benz for scheduling this National hearing in Redmond, Oregon. I also want to thank all of the other Congressmen and Congresswomen that have taken the time to be here, listen to our concerns, and to visit our beautiful community.

My name is Trish (Patricia) Kentner Backsen, DVM. I have a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology, a Master's Degree in Education, and a Doctorate in Veterinary Medicine.

My husband and I own a couple of small businesses in Central Oregon. Our businesses are based in agriculture and we employ around 40 people in the Central Oregon community.

One business, Haystack Farm and Feed, INC, in Culver, Oregon produces livestock, horse, poultry, and rabbit feed that we ship across the Northwest and to other areas in the country. In addition to the feed mill, we farm around 1200 acres in Jefferson County. We operate a retail store in Redmond, OR where we sell irrigation parts for agriculture, livestock feed, and pet supplies. I have also practiced as a veterinarian for the past 32 years.

There have been major challenges for all small businesses the past few years. Agricultural businesses have been hit hard in this area due to the increased costs of fuel, seed, fertilizer, and herbicides. We have endured a significant water shortage due to the drought which has been compounded by challenges presented by the Oregon Spotted Frog. Another significant issue in operating a

small business is trying to find employees. This is a major concern for every other business owner that I have spoken with! Many farms, especially in Jefferson County, are going out of business because of a culmination of these issues. Their property values have decreased significantly and generational farms are becoming extinct.

Jefferson County has a unique growing environment where a lot of seed and other specialty crops are produced in the area. It produces a majority of the worlds carrot seed and one farm is the second highest producer of wild flower seed in the USA. The importance of that particular crop is that they specialize in growing wild flower seeds that attract the Monarch Butterfly. It is a species that is probably going to be added to the endangered species list in the near future.

The effect of the lack of water on Jefferson County Farms has been devastating. We are receiving approximately one half of our traditional water allotment. Of the 1200 acres that we farm, we are only harvesting crops on around 400-450 acres. We still have to pay the water delivery charges no matter how much water that we receive.

Weeds are another issue that farmers are constantly dealing with. Weed management is important as the unmanaged weeds can also present a huge fire danger to surrounding properties. For example, this last summer we sprayed our non-planted fields four times with herbicides. Unfortunately, this presents another issue for the environment. The herbicides can possibly seep into the ground and potentially into the aquifer. Planted, growing fields are great at converting CO2 to Oxygen. Weeds are not!

We have historically bought the majority of the ingredients used in our feeds as locally as possible. The decrease in available crops in this area has forced us to source the products from other areas in Oregon and from other states to meet the ingredient demands for our production. This increases the cost of doing business!

Farmers are also trying to find viable crop options that take less water to produce. We grew flaxseed this year and a few farmers grew Canola. Both only take a few waterings compared to other products in the area. More thoughts and emphasis around drought resistant crops might provide additional farming options for this area.

We appreciate Representative Lori Chavez-Deremer and Representative Cliff Benz for their help in providing this area with resources to try and mitigate the water issues that we are experiencing. There are several projects going on that have been funded by the Federal Government to increase the efficiency of the water delivery systems which will help conserve as much water as possible. I know there has been a huge effort by all the irrigation districts in the area! Some districts have already been piped. COID (Central Oregon Irrigation District) manages the largest amount of water, and has senior water rights. They have been active in piping areas to try to conserve water and become more efficient with water use.

North Unit Irrigation District has one of the most efficient water systems and farmers in that area have upgraded their equipment to utilize their irrigation in the best ways possible. All of the water used is monitored and subtracted from your yearly water allotment.

It's a great start, but we also have to balance our water needs throughout all the industries and the general water requirements needed for Central Oregon. Central Oregon has become a huge tourist attraction due to our incredible scenery, recreational opportunities, outdoor activities, and great weather. The influx of population moving into this area the last few decades has stressed our resources including water, housing, medical, roads, and has caused many other infrastructure challenges that our community is struggling to cope with!

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at your hearing to help showcase the challenges that we are facing in Central Oregon with our water issues.