

# Irrigators dissatisfied with Oregon water storage fix

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**A fix to Oregon's water storage law hasn't won the support of irrigator and farm groups, who say the bill is incomplete.**

Farm and irrigation advocates worry that a partial fix to Oregon water storage law may lead to new complications farther down the road.

Last year, a review by state attorneys determined the Oregon Water Resources Department lacks the authority to transfer water storage rights.

This new interpretation meant that OWRD could not longer authorize changing the location of stored water, the point of diversion of stored water or the purpose of stored water, even though it had traditionally permitted such changes.

Under Senate Bill 51, the agency would regain its power to change the pur-

pose of stored water — such as shifting a reservoir from irrigation to municipal use — without addressing its authority over location and

points of diversion.

"It's not the first time people have disagreed about interpreting water law by a long shot," said Tom Byler,

the agency's director during a recent legislative hearing. "We hope that this is something we can resolve quickly and put us on a path for communities to have the tools to meet their future needs."

While organizations representing irrigators want to resolve the question of changing the purpose of stored water, they've urged the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources against a "piecemeal" approach to straightening out OWRD's authority over water storage rights.

"We would prefer we take a step back, address the complete issue and only move forward with a solution if it's comprehensive," said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of public policy for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

As irrigators undertake water conservation projects and seismic upgrades to reservoirs, they will need all three ways of transferring water storage rights and not just changing the purpose of storage, she said.

Focusing on fixing only OWRD's storage purpose authority may lead to additional complications if different standards are developed for changing storage locations and points of diversion, Cooper said.

The Oregon Farm Bureau also disagrees with the Oregon Department of Justice's legal analysis that water regulators currently lack the statutory authority to transfer water storage rights, she said.

Leaving the issue of water storage right transfers only partially resolved

may lead to more litigation and uncertainty for water users, said April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, which represents irrigation districts.

Irrigators need all the tools at their disposal to change reservoir locations and make improvements as storage challenges grow, Snell said. "Drought and climate change mean we're going to have more rain and less snowfall."

The OWRD hopes to have discussions about other aspects of its water storage authority in the future, but for now the Legislature can move forward regarding storage purpose changes, which are less controversial, said Racquel Rancier, the agency's senior policy coordinator.

## Health: Wallowa County comes up big in support of integrated health care

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Immediately, it was apparent how much planning and care the organizations spent preparing for this event. Amy Bush and Tosca Rawls, as the public relations and development team for the Center for Wellness, are responsible for much of the auction's success. Of all the enticing silent auction

packages, only two were not donated by local people or businesses.

The vibe of the evening was warm and cheery. Participants greeted each other with smiles and words of good will. "It almost feels like friends and family gathering for a meal," said Jett.

After the silent auction, the evening's program began with a heartwarming inter-

view with one of the Center for Wellness's many beneficiaries. Tim Richardson, interviewed by Wilson, told an inspiring story of addiction, second chances, and community support.

Entangled with drugs and alcohol since age 8 but now 14 months sober, Richardson thanked the Center for Wellness, saying, "you guys saved my life." He then spoke of his love for his daughter, who he named as his primary source of inspiration. "I want her to be proud of me."

Richardson then credited Judge Tom Powers, who was in attendance, and his employer, Bronson Log Homes for providing a second chance, along with guidance and support on his path towards recovery. Bronson Log Homes also had representatives in attendance.

From there, the night launched into an active live auction while people ate their top-rate meals served by the Wallowa Lake Lodge staff. The first segment of the live

auction led into the night's second emotional interview.

Chris Borgerding, whose son Mathew Larson-Borgerding has received support services from the Wellness Center for over 15 years, came up to the microphone next. Tina Borgerding, Larson-Borgerding's mom and Chris Borgerding's wife was also in attendance. Speaking about his son's experience, Borgerding said, "everybody loves Mathew." In fact, "his senior year in high school, he was voted prom king."

Emphasizing the important role of the Center for Wellness for his entire family, "they've really come through for us," said Borgerding. But for the nonprofit's services, the Borgerdings may have had to put their son in a residential home that could adequately provide the support he needed.

Next on the agenda was a paddle raise, where the group was challenged to match a \$100,000 gift from last year. With Wilson on the mic, the

gifts started off strong with a couple gifts at \$10,000. Then Borgerding himself announced a gift of \$40,000.

Several locals followed suit with gifts ranging from \$5,000 on down to \$1,000, and Dan DeBoie, who currently sits as chair of the Center for Wellness's board of directors, stood in place of several members of his late wife's family to offer a gift of \$1,800. DeBoie's late wife dedicated much of her life to mental health services. Wrapping up the honorary gift, DeBoie said, "and in the spirit of good family competition, I'll match the \$1,800."

While \$219,000 may seem pale in comparison to the overall goal of \$6.8 million, it goes a lot further than that. The Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness and Winding Waters have an ask in to the Oregon Legislature for \$2.5 million, and will be in Salem March 4. Both Jett and Wilson stressed how important a strong show of

community support will be in locking up that money from the state, and again as the two nonprofits seek funding from grant foundations.

Giving context to this element of the fundraising process, Wilson pointed out that in two years hosting this event the organization has raised over \$575,000. With a total of 84 seats over that period, "it's a remarkable show of support from the community," said Wilson.

There seemed to be a collective appreciation for the overall generosity of the residents of Wallowa County. This was the second year hosting a "Hearts for Health" fundraiser for the integrated care building. It's been so successful that the organizations plan to host it as an annual event, even after this particular goal is met.

In his closing remarks, Borgerding perhaps summed it up best, "in this county we take care of ourselves and we always have ... Wallowa County, don't ya love it?"



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