



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

June 10, 2021

To: House Committee on Rules

Rep. Barbara Smith Warner, Chair

Rep. Christine Drazan and Paul Holvey, Vice Chairs

Members of the Committee

Re: **SB 16 – Converting 200 Acres of Agriculture Land in Eastern OR – OPPOSE**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon supports our statewide land use planning program. We also have strong positions around water quality and quantity, as well as addressing natural hazards. **SB 16 would take agricultural land and convert it to rural residential housing while the City of Ontario is seeing growth where needed infrastructure—sewer and water facilities—should be.** The proposed conversion would remove this acreage from the main economy in the Border Board area. Those hills are great for cattle!

Additionally, because these residents would be outside of a city where sewer and water infrastructure is usually provided, it would mean these homes would need to install septic systems that could eventually reduce water quality. And wells would be allowed under our exempt well laws to put straws into potentially fragile groundwater areas. These “straws” could create future challenges for the agricultural industry dependent on groundwater since much of our surface water is over appropriated.

See [Slide #3](#) of a presentation by Rep. Mark Owens that shows the many **groundwater restricted areas** in Oregon, including near Ontario. He provided that well users are accessing “paleowater” in his Harney County area and not recharging. Over 170 domestic well users reported a decline in the yield and rate of their wells in his Harney County area in the last 10 years. Additionally, the snowpack in the Malheur Basin ended the month of April at just 12% of normal, the lowest in the state as reported in a [May OPB article](#).

Separately, there is a [Groundwater Management Area](#) in Malheur County related to pollution, according to the Dept. of Environmental Quality.

The League has been supportive of the transload facility in the area and we are monitoring the proposed gold mine out of Vale. There are exciting things happening in the Border area. The Board’s work with the Oregon Community Foundation to get the money provided to the Border Board is positive. **This bill is simply not the right answer for the area.**

Thank you for considering our request. **We ask that you VOTE NO on SB 16.**

Rebecca Gladstone
LWVOR President

Peggy Lynch
LWVOR Natural Resources Coordinator