



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Water Resources Department

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Testimony for House Bill 2168

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

Co-Chair Ken Helm

Co-Chair Mark Owens

Submitted by: Bryn Hudson, Legislative Coordinator

1/22/2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information related to House Bill 2168, which seeks to provide expanded resources available to privately owned domestic water systems; more specifically, resources for the Well Abandonment, Repair and Replacement Fund. This information is provided for informational purposes and the Department is not taking a position at this time.

Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund

The Water Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund (WARRF) was established through the passage of House Bill 2145 (2021) and provides financial assistance to help Oregonians repair or replace and permanently abandon a household well that is dry or severely declining or that was damaged or destroyed by wildfire that is unable to supply water for household purposes. Additional authority was granted in by HB 2010 (2023) to allow for the fund to address wells in areas of groundwater contamination.

This program offers grants up to \$40,000 to pay to repair or replace and abandon privately owned, domestic wells that can no longer supply enough water to sustain the household. Wells connected to public water systems are not eligible for funding.

Since the program was established in 2021, at the direction of the legislature, the Department has prioritized funding for repair, replacement, or abandonment of low to moderate income household wells affected by drought or wildfire.

Expanded staffing capacity authorized in 2021 has allowed the Department to dedicate significant time supporting applicants navigating the process to restore water to their home. This includes helping applicants understand the funding options available for up-front costs or costs that are not eligible for reimbursement, coordination with other agencies, including the Department of Human Services to coordinate with applicants with unique medical needs, and helping applicants understand what types of contractors may be needed to fully restore water, including a well constructor, electrician, plumber, and a pump installer.

Program Impact

In total, the legislature has invested \$6.4 million into the WARRF; the Department has obligated all \$6.4 million, however, there is currently \$250,000 available for new grants due to returned funding from completed projects. The Department started accepting applications in June of 2022 and since has received more than 380 applications, funded work in 17 counties across the State, and water has been restored to over 200 homes.

Recipients of WARRF grants include parents with young children, elderly adults who are now able to stay in their homes, and adults with significant medical needs that were displaced and but can now return



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to their homes since their water has been restored. This program makes a difference in the lives of Oregonians.

The Future of WARRF

Department staff are engaging in programmatic work to stand up the full program which involves permanent rulemaking and further policy work to implement the full provisions of the fund, including wells impacted by declining groundwater levels and those serving as conduits for contamination.