



What Is SB 1153?

SB 1153 would alter how farmers and other water users can use and make changes to their existing water rights in Oregon. Water rights are legal ways for individuals and entities to use water (from rivers, reservoirs, or wells). Our members use water rights to grow food, plants, and other crops but water rights can be used for a variety of legal purposes (like drinking water or for a business). If you need to make a change to where or how water is used, this is called a *transfer*. For farmers, this process helps them adapt to things like drought and other weather changes, natural disasters, changing crops and market demands, or conservation projects.

Why Are People Concerned?

Many people think SB 1153 is trying to fix a problem that no one has proved exists. The changes in the bill are confusing, and could lead to new problems:

- It does not define clear standards, which means people might end up in court more often.
- It makes it harder for farmers and irrigation districts to make changes to their existing water rights when they need to, keeping them from being efficient.
- It adds more work to a state agency (OWRD) that's already behind and asking for more money.
- It adds more review standards to an already complicated approval process that can take years, sometimes decades.
- Even though public input has been limited, most people who commented on the bill don't support it.

What is a Transfer? In basic terms, transfers can be used to change *where a water right is used* (such as from one field to another); *where the water is taken out* (such as moving a pump or pipe intake); or for *what purpose the water is used* (such as irrigation to instream or primary to back-up). Transfers can be *permanent* or *temporary* and are looked at and approved by the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD). The existing process already has safeguards to make sure other water users, including instream water rights, are not harmed and that more water is not used.

Was Anything Good About the Bill?

In SB 1153 language discussions, there was general agreement on providing a structured option for tribes to weigh in on the transfer process. Tribal representatives raised specific concerns about transfers potentially impacting their treaty recognized water rights, and everyone worked together on language to find a solution for that part. That's a great example of how making laws *should* work: solving real problems by agreeing on the issue and working on it together.

Why Does This Matter?

Farmers, ranchers, nursery operators, irrigation districts, and others rely on water transfers to produce food, especially when the climate changes or they want to conserve water. Without transfers, they lose the flexibility to adapt, and that can hurt Oregon's rural communities. Plus, adding this new unclear standard will likely slow down OWRD processes even more, impacting other water stakeholders too. We need to work together to help the agency be better at its current job before adding more work.

So What Should Happen Now?

Instead of rushing half-baked policy, lawmakers should slow down and talk more with the people who use and depend on water every day. Big changes like this need more time, better public input, and clearer solutions. There are bi-partisan ways to address Oregon's water needs—rushed ideas like SB 1153 are not it.

Where can I learn more?

Additional details on SB 1153 can be found in the attached two-page document.