



SB 247

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon Submitted to Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

March 13, 2015

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group that has worked for thirty years to protect and restore natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's rivers, lakes and streams. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch of Oregon supports the fee increases in SB 247 (POP 102)

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is an agency whose work is critical to the health of Oregon's rivers and the fish, wildlife and people who depend upon them. The work of ODFW is diverse and wide-spanning. Its work is critical not only to protecting and restoring streamflows, but is also a key component to sustainable water development statewide.

We are here today to ask you to support SB 247, and to specifically reject the proposed cut of the Water Program and any District and/or Assistant District Biologists (if SB 247 does not pass). The importance of the "water shop" to Oregonians cannot be overstated. The water program, currently a very small staff of three in Salem who work in coordination with district and assistant district biologists across the state, are involved in nearly every water allocation and reallocation decision made in this state. This staff also serves as key participants in the state's major water policy and/or water development initiatives that are increasingly being relied upon to help find solutions to the many water challenges facing our state.

There is much attention this legislative session being directed toward the implementation of the "Integrated Water Resources Strategy" adopted by the Oregon Water Resources Commission in 2012, including a strong push for "water development" across the state (including a requested \$50 million dollars in lottery/GO bonds). Neither of these campaigns can succeed without the participation of ODFW's Water Program and District and Assistant District Biologists.

With regards to the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, the Legislature in 2009 directed the state (via HB 3369) to develop an integrated water resources strategy to meet Oregon's instream and out-of-stream needs. The Strategy has 42 recommended actions. Much of the work under the strategy involves the direct work of the ODFW water program and biologist staff. Without this small set of ODFW people, any "integration" of the Strategy for the needs of rivers and fish

will be lost. There simply is no other capacity in Oregon to provide this element of the statutorily required "integration" of the Strategy for rivers and fish.

Similarly, statutes and rules also require ODFW participation in many, if not all, water development projects. New water rights, storage permits, hydro projects, transfers, extensions are all required to undergo environmental reviews by ODFW. If the water program and biologists are cut, it is likely that processing of the many projects desired by water users across the state will slow significantly.

And finally, increasingly, the state is looking for collaborative efforts to solve increasingly complex water issues facing Oregonians across the state. Whether the Columbia River Umatilla Solutions Taskforce (CRUST, Columbia River), the Water for Irrigation Steams and Economy (WISE, Rogue River), Deschutes Groundwater Mitigation Program (Deschutes, Crooked and Metolious Rivers) and other important initiatives, ODFW's expertise has been critical in reaching agreements that allow development to move forward in a way that protects Oregon's beloved rivers and streams for the wide-ranging interests that depend on them.

Please support SB 247.

Thank you for your consideration.

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