

**Testimony to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Natural Resources
on Senate Bill 5539**

19 March 2019

**Karen Lewotsky, Rural Partnerships Director
Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports SB 5539, which provides funding for the important work of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).

OWEB's mission is to help protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies. As a non-regulatory agency, OWEB leverages lottery dollars to achieve important restoration goals on-the-ground. OWEB also coordinates with state and federal agencies, foundations, universities, and local partners to address complex, landscape-scale natural resource conservation issues, fostering collaborative activities and programs, such as sage-grouse habitat conservation and Governor Brown's initiative to create a secure, safe and resilient water future for all Oregonians.

In particular, we draw your attention to POP #130 in the agency's budget.

POP #130 requests \$325,000 from Lottery Funds for providing contracting resources to assist with conservation policy and strategy coordination. Tackling those complex, landscape-scale problems issues requires coordination on policy challenges and development of strategic investment approaches. This package will provide resources to address essential coordination needs by providing funds for personal service contracts to deliver conservation policy and strategy coordination activities in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

While the agency utilizes staff for positions that need strong institutional knowledge and mission focus, contracted services are used where specific expertise is needed to quickly address key needs—for example, regarding issues such as water infrastructure and sage-grouse conservation—with lower overhead costs. These funds are used in lieu of hiring additional staff, as the need may be for short-term, multidisciplinary support—difficult to find in a single person.

Oregon is embarking on the challenge of preparing a 100-Year Water Vision, one that guarantees a secure, safe and resilient water future that meets the needs of all Oregonians. Stakeholder involvement will be key to success. Developing and implementing an inclusive process that incorporates input across the diverse communities, regions and user needs for clean and plentiful water into the future will require a focused investment of expertise and experience. This is a great example of a

situation where the services of a contractor can deliver targeted outcomes in an expeditious manner on a tight timeline.

The aging water infrastructure of our state combined with the challenges of climate change, drought and economic uncertainty mean that the time is now for addressing Oregon's water future. Incorporating natural infrastructure in our water management systems will save money; addressing regional concerns will ensure no part of Oregon is left behind; and increasing efficiencies in irrigation and other water uses will make more water available for in-stream uses.

Oregon Environmental Council urges you to pass SB 5539, which will ensure that the vital resources of OWEB are available to help Oregon face the challenges looming in our collective water future. Please approve SB 5539.