



Oregon Association of
Conservation Districts

March 20th, 2019

To: House Committee on Natural Resources

hnr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

From: The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Support for HB 2979, Assistance for Repair and Replacement of Tide Gates

To Chair Witt, Vice-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 2979. I am testifying on behalf of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts to express support for HB 2979, which will provide for assistance in the replacement and repair of small tide gates. The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts serves and represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, which are special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners. **We encourage the legislature to support HB 2979 to improve the ability of landowners and the local technical assistance organizations who support them to protect and improve valuable farmland, infrastructure, fish passage, and habitat.**

Much of Oregon's 363 miles of coastline, and even many miles along the Columbia River in Clatsop and Columbia counties, are protected by more than 1,000 tide gates. Tide gates serve to protect infrastructure and agricultural land by regulating waterflow between tidally influenced waters and the streams that drain into them. Many tide gates were installed decades ago and often need repairs to prevent saltwater contamination of farmland, sediment accumulation and flooding, or similar problems from abrupt, unmanaged alterations to streamflow. Aging tide gates also benefit from repairs that improve fish passage and habitat upstream of the gate. Repairing and replacing tide gates is a goal shared by a wide variety of local partners, and all stakeholders hoping to protect and improve our state's anadromous fish populations. **Landowners clearly want to repair tide gates on their properties for both economic and ecological benefits, but they and the local technical assistance organizations they work with have often been stymied by a complex, unclear, time-intensive permitting process.**

The state established a partnership to address this problem through discussions between agencies like the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), the Oregon Department

of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), technical assistance organizations like Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Watershed Councils, industry representatives like Oregon Cattlemen's Association, and landowner representatives from the coast. My colleagues and I at OACD agree that **HB 2979 and its companion bill, SB 812, would be a strong, meaningful first step in improving the tide gate process as discussed in the statewide partnership.** We are discussing slight changes to the bill with partners to ensure consistency and to ensure that the proposed tide gate coordinator can support the range of partners involved in tide gate repair, replacement, and restoration on the local level. These changes will increase trust in the tide gate process and coordinator—a crucial goal in any assistance program with a strong regulatory nexus—and improve efficiency and effectiveness. Local assistance organizations like SWCDs can be a point of contact between multiple landowners and the coordinator, potentially aggregating communications to reduce the coordinator's workload. Ensuring the coordinator can offer coordination services through SWCDs, and even be housed in an SWCD, will allow for this efficiency, and utilize and strengthen existing trusted relationships between landowners and those organizations.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB 2979 and the importance of repairing, replacing, and restoring tide gate systems. **We encourage you to pass HB 2979 facilitate the improvement of tide gates for the sake of anadromous fish populations, habitat and water quality, and coastal communities and economies.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



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