



Oregon Association of
Conservation Districts

April 3rd, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
senr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

From: The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Support for SB 812, Assistance for Repair and Replacement of Tide Gates

To Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Olsen and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 812. I am testifying on behalf of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts to express support for SB 812, 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 nonprofit, federal, and state partners like the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. **We encourage the legislature to support SB 812 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 among 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. The resulting recommendations for three new positions—providing coordination, engineering services, and technical support—would improve the coordination and timeliness of tide gate permitting processes, facilitating the much needed repair and replacement of tide gates throughout the Oregon coast. **SB 812 would be a strong, meaningful first step in improving the tide gate process as discussed in the statewide partnership.**

We would like to highlight that the coordinator proposed in this bill will be contracted with an independent third party, and will be able to assist local technical assistance organizations in addition to the landowners these organizations serve. This approach will maximize trust in the tide gate process and coordinator—a crucial goal in any assistance program with a strong regulatory nexus—and ensure 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. **Enabling the coordinator to offer coordination services through SWCDs will allow for this efficiency, and utilize and strengthen existing trusted relationships among landowners and those organizations.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB 812 and the importance of repairing, replacing, and restoring tide gate systems. **We encourage you to pass SB 812 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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