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March 4, 2021

To: [House Committee on Water](#)  
Rep. Ken Helm, Chair  
Rep. Mark Owens and Jeff Reardon, Vice Chairs  
Members of the Committee

Re: **HB 2018** – Groundwater Budgets – **Comments**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon has strong positions on both water quality and quantity. We have studied water issues since 1969. We had a seat on the original Integrated Water Resources Strategy Policy Advisory Group in 2012 and the 2017 update. Collection of data is critical to resource management. Groundwater studies take a number of years to complete and Oregon is behind in gathering this important data as we see more demands for groundwater. The majority of new permit applications are for groundwater. Without adequate data, how can these requests be fairly processed?

We were impressed by the [December presentation](#) around the use of satellite data to help provide information on groundwater usage in a particular area of Oregon. Although LWVOR has continually supported legislation to increase groundwater basin studies, it seems as if there is never enough money to move the data dial.

In 2019, we supported **Package 102 – Groundwater Data, Management, and Protection** – *Increases the state’s understanding of water supplies by allowing the Department to conduct one additional groundwater study at a time, while also preparing other basins for study and conducting more timely groundwater right reviews. The next basin intended for study is the Walla Walla Subbasin. Adds nine positions: OPA 3 public engagement coordinator, NRS 3 well construction specialist, NRS 3 hydrogeologist, NRS 4 hydrogeologist, NRS 3 hydrogeologist groundwater reviewer, NRS 4 hydrologist, ISS 6 database application developer, NRS 2 hydrographer, and a NRS 3 hydrographer. Provides cost-share funding for groundwater study (\$300k), geologic mapping (\$100k), and observation wells (\$400k). Total: \$2,837,027 General Fund; 9 positions. IWRS Recommended Actions: 1.A and 1.B*

The adopted budget for **HB 5043 (2019) Package 102** included “a \$1,659,740 General Fund appropriation and authorizes the establishment of six permanent positions (5.28 FTE) for the evaluation of groundwater basin studies in cooperation with the U.S. Geological Society and the Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries. Each basin study takes between five to six years to complete. This package will double the Department’s capacity to conduct the studies. In addition to the funding included in this package, the Department will be using existing Other Funds expenditure limitation of \$300,000 for cost-sharing expenses related to the studies from exempt well use fee funds.”

In 2019, we also supported continuation of the Place-Based Planning Program and, as you heard from us on Tuesday, we hope to see a continuation of that work (see **HB 3105 verbal comments**). Rep. Owens, in bringing HB 2018 to you, suggests using a less expensive method of moving the dial on groundwater data, but also recognizes the need for facilitated community conversations, a feature of the Place-Based Planning Program.

LWVOR volunteers follow many of the state agency budgets, including those in Natural Resources. It was unclear today the fiscal impact of HB 2018, but even some resources invested in this technology effort will move us forward. It was noted in the hearing that “consistency of funding” is important. Yet, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Session of 2019, the following cuts were made in **SB 5723**:

*General Fund reductions of \$2,307,924 in multiple agency divisions were approved to help balance the state General Fund budget. Accrued and anticipated vacancy savings include: • \$419,529 in the Director’s Office, from **delay in filling a position associated with a second groundwater basin study team, and a delay in hiring the remaining four positions in the Technical Services Division** • \$723,251 in the Field Services Division • \$333,305 in the Water Rights Servicing Division and • \$831,839 in the Technical Services Division, **including a delay in hiring four positions associated with a second groundwater basin study team**. Although the hiring of the positions is delayed, additional funding that was provided to the agency this biennium included federal cost-share funds and funding for additional monitoring and test wells. This funding combined with existing agency resources allows the agency to move forward with expanding basin studies in spite of the hiring delay. In addition to the delay in hiring the groundwater positions, the associated position-related services and supplies was reduced by \$121,262 General Fund in the Technical Services Division.*

*Reductions in unobligated funding for observation wells (\$50,000 General Fund) and gaging stations (\$27,186 General Fund) was approved for the Technical Services Division. The committee also approved a decrease of \$106,914 General Fund in the Field Services Division for state cost share subsidy of water measurement devices installed by water users.*

A reminder: “**All water within the State from all sources of water belongs to the public.**” You hear voices from many interests around water in this committee. But none is greater than the whole. As you move bills forward to Ways and Means this session, please consider balancing those needs while advocating for both data collection and staff to manage Oregon’s dwindling water supplies.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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