



March 18, 2021

To Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: SB 5545 – Support for Oregon Water Resources Department Budget with Recommendations for Improvements

Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon and Committee Members,

OACD represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, 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.

OACD supports the funding provided by SB 5545 per the Governors recommended budget. However, we believe that additional funding is needed to advance our understanding and management of the State's water resources.

**There is insufficient funding to advance the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRs) and further the State's Water Vision.** The IWRs is a long-range planning document that sets an excellent course for the State, but it cannot be adequately implemented under current funding levels.

**There is insufficient funding to advance climate change mitigation and adaptation.** OWRD is working to address climate change under Executive Order 20-04, and has implementation plan dated May 15, 2020. However, this plan notes that OWRD does not have sufficient resources to address many important actions. Actions that Department would like to take but which remain underfunded according to the implementation plan include the following:

- Integration of climate issues into Department work and coordination with agencies
- Drought response, mitigation and adaptation
- Water resources planning
- Improving the understanding of the impacts of climate change
- Implementing water supply solutions

**There is insufficient funding for field services.** This deficit is reflected in the lack of resources and staffing. Watermasters and other field staff provide a number of vital services and are the front line of contact with the citizens of the State. Watermasters conduct streamflow measurements and maintain gauging stations; conduct well

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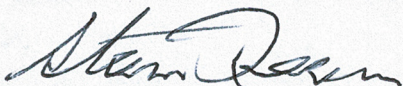
inspections and collect groundwater level data; perform routine dam safety inspections; assist in stream recovery efforts; provide information to landowners and others about wells, water rights, and Oregon Water Law; regulate water use during times of shortage; and mediate disputes between water users and enforce water rights. All of these tasks are critical to understanding and managing our water resources.

There are a number of policy option packages (POPs) that were proposed by the Department but are not included in the Governors Recommended budget that are very important. These are as follows:

- Policy Option Package #109: Timely Water Management and Distribution. This POP adds resources to improve the ability of the watermasters to provide essential services.
- Policy Option Package #110: Foundational Data for Groundwater Studies. This POP directly address key aspects of the IRWS and climate change by developing a better understanding of our water supplies and the future availability of water.
- Policy Option Package #111: Complex Water Issues: Deschutes & Other Basins. This POP address key aspects of the IRWS and climate change by helping communities resolve complex water management issues as we work to secure Oregon's water future in the face of increased water scarcity.
- Policy Option Package #112: Harney Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program This POP address key aspects of the IRWS and climate change by addressing a critically impacted groundwater basin and setting conditions for a sustainable future.
- Policy Option Package #113: Willamette Basin Reallocation Pre-implementation This POP address key aspects of the IRWS and climate change by supporting a reallocation of water supplies for a sustainable future.

In conclusion, we support the funding that is recommended by the Governor but believe that significantly more funding is needed to advance our priorities for management of our water resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your decision-making process.



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