



March 22, 2021

To: Co-Chair Senator Kathleen Taylor, Co-Chair Representative Jeff Reardon, and Members of Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

RE: Testimony in Support of Oregon Water Resources Department 2021-23 Budget and Components of SB 5542

Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is writing to voice our strong support for the State's continued investment in water resources and specific General Fund allocations for the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD). The 2021-23 budget package includes funding elements that will be addressed in this subcommittee as well as the capital construction subcommittee—all of which are necessary for a holistic and sustainable approach to managing Oregon's water resources. We are supportive of allocating resources that will help WRD fulfill its critical mission of serving "the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management."

OWRC is a nonprofit association of irrigation districts, water control districts, improvement districts, drainage districts and other government entities delivering agricultural water supplies. The water stewards we represent operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, hydropower facilities, and deliver water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. Our members, and the thousands of water users they serve, are a vital component of Oregon's economic engine, delivering water supplies to grow food and fiber sold and consumed locally, nationally, and globally. The ability of our members to prudently manage water resources is intrinsically tied to the capacity of the WRD to provide data and field support necessary for water management, process transactions in timely fashion, and invest in water projects. We commend your continued hard work in designing a balanced budget that meets the needs of all Oregonians and ask that you include investments in water supply management and development in your final budget package.

There are several key funding packages that we request be included in WRD's 2021-23 Budget:

- ◆ **Support Data Collection & Water Management in the Field** – Essential data collection to better understand ground water resources; maximizes field staff presence to support timely water management around the state; strengthens core agency functions and supports the Integrated Water Resources Strategy. *Packages #87 State Data Center, #109 Field Services (Agency Request Budget)*
- ◆ **Invest in Projects to Meet Water Needs** – Additional grant and loan funds for the feasibility and implementation of water projects through the Water Supply Development Account (created by SB 839 in 2013); and the Water Conservation, Reuse and Storage grant program (created by SB 1069 in 2008). *Package #108*
- ◆ **Help Resolve Complex Water Issues** – Supports basin level problem solving and coordination of agency activities; creates new Regional Basin Coordinator position to work with water users to develop and implement collaborative solutions; help reduce litigation in some of the most contentious basins (Deschutes and other basins). *Package #111 (Agency Request Budget)*

- ◆ **Willamette Basin Reallocation Implementation Workgroup** – Supports interagency coordination and facilitated workgroup needed to implement Willamette Basin Reallocation; allow the Department to pursue the pre-implementation tasks of: the conversion of two storage water rights to expanded uses; contracting with the owner of the federal reservoirs; developing target flows below the reservoirs; and mapping out the process for conversion of minimum flows to instream water rights. Package #113 (*Agency Request Budget*)

As our state faces increased occurrences of extreme weather events and impacts from climate change it is essential that WRD has adequate resources to carry out its core functions, supporting wise water management and multi-benefit water supply projects. In the last several biennia, WRD awarded millions of dollars in feasibility and implementation grants throughout the state. These grant funds have gone to a variety of projects that include conservation, efficiency and increased water supply. It is imperative Oregon continues to make prudent and targeted investments in water supply today to help ensure we have adequate water supplies in the future for our growing communities, innovative industries, and dynamic environment.

We recognize the difficult choices you are faced with and commend you for your efforts in funding Oregon's natural resources agencies. The costs associated with planning for and meeting our water needs greatly exceed the current available resources but continuing to make small investments at the state level can catalyze and leverage local and federal funding. A mix of General Fund dollars to support WRD's core functions combined with a modest bonding package for planning, feasibility, and implementation of water projects is prudent investment that will pay dividends to current and future generations of Oregonians.

We appreciate your consideration of these modest water investments and for your ongoing efforts to develop a balanced budget for the 2021-23 biennium.

Sincerely,
April Snell
Executive Director