



March 23, 2021

Comments in support of HB 5037 and HB 5038 (OWEB Funding Package)
Before the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Submitted by: The Oregon Conservation Partnership

Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon:

About the Oregon Conservation Partnership

The Oregon Conservation Partnership represents 160 conservation organizations that work together to conserve Oregon’s native fish and wildlife habitat and protect watershed health. Our members- land trusts, soil and water conservation districts, and watershed councils- work with willing landowners to accomplish voluntary conservation and restoration across Oregon.

We are writing today in strong support of OWEB’s budget bills (HB 5037 and HB 5038) and for the restoration of core capacity through policy package 100.

The members of the Oregon Conservation Partnership and OWEB share a common purpose to protect and restore habitat in a manner consistent with community needs and local economies. Land trusts, watershed councils and districts create a robust network of local organizations that partner with landowners to restore riparian areas, improve water quality and monitor ecological outcomes over time. These organizations leverage OWEB funding with private and federal funding sources to ensure that OWEB’s investments are benefiting Oregonians in perpetuity.

Over the past twenty years, these investments have resulted in over:

- 5,000 stream miles restored;
- 1 million acres of upland habitat restored; and
- 50,000 acres of wetland or estuarine habitat created.

This year, OWEB’s budget bills HB 5037 and HB 5038 reflect a reduced base budget that could impair the Agency’s ability to deliver critical programs that protect native fish and wildlife, and ensure watershed health for future generations. Cuts proposed in the Governor’s Budget would

undermine the effectiveness of base programs that are essential in delivering the mission of OWEB.

Proposed budget reductions will impact land protection

The Governor’s 2021-2023 Budget proposes a base budget cut that will dramatically shrink the contract services OWEB needs to support its land protection program. These contract services provide specialized expertise on real estate transactions to support OWEB’s M76 commitment to protect native fish and wildlife habitat. Without funding for contract services (Package 100-Program Continuity) this program will suffer, impacting current and future land protection projects.

Importance of OWEB’s land acquisition program

OWEB is the only statewide funding source for land protection in Oregon. Their land acquisition program protects special ecosystems like the high-elevation grasslands of Zumwalt Prairie, the cold-water refuge of Whychus canyon in Deschutes County, and the Rainforest Reserve, a 29 square-mile conservation corridor on the North Coast. Land trusts across Oregon leverage OWEB grants to ensure our most special places are protected forever.

In addition to restoring contract funding, we support Policy Package 100 for 2 core staffing positions (not included in the Governor’s Budget):

The Oregon Conservation partnership supports the Policy package 100 that would continue two important staffing positions not included in the GB:

- Conservation Outcomes Specialist (NRS-3)- tracks and communicates outcomes of M76 investments.
- Partnerships Coordinator (NRS-4)- large landscape restoration initiatives that address Oregon’s most critical conservation needs through regional partnership networks.

We support Policy Package 110 for a new position on water and climate (included in GB)

The future of healthy watersheds relies on immediate action to address climate change and to secure clean water for wildlife and people. We strongly support the 100-year water vision set forth by Governor Brown and the role of our natural landscapes in providing clean and secure water. The health of our water is inextricably tied to the health of our land. Natural lands like wetlands, forests, working landscapes and open space provide critical infrastructure that collect, store and filter water and thereby protect the quantity and quality of our water. We believe this new position provides essential capacity to support Oregon’s 100-year water vision and its goal to “prepare a secure, safe, and resilient water future for all Oregonians.”

We emphasize the importance of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (package 230), recognized the GB as eligible to receive non-state funding in this biennium

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) was established by the legislature in 2017 to protect working farms and ranches that support fish and wildlife. Oregon's working lands are a cornerstone of our climate and food security and the economic fabric of our rural communities. This program was approved to prevent the fragmentation and conversion of our working lands,

and to match federal programs like the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Our statewide partnership believes OAHP is a vital program to protect fish and wildlife habitat on working lands.

Lottery Funding Outlook

OWEB was one of the first agencies to experience sharp budget impacts from the onset of COVID. When lottery revenue fell precipitously last year, the Agency responded by designing an efficient staffing model that continued to get funding on the ground to conservation partners across the state. OWEB is resilient and extremely efficient with its resources. During historic economic downturns, lottery revenue typically continues at a steady pace and is protected from the downturns that impact other revenue sources. With restaurants re-opening, we are already seeing lottery revenue hit new records. **Weekly video lottery sales, which were under \$1 million in early January, topped \$21 million in early March.** ([Oregon Video Lottery Sales Hit All-Time High As Restaurants, Bars Reopen: 'Cabin Fever is Real'](#)- The Oregonian, March 10 2021).

We ask that the Legislature approve a budget that allows future lottery revenue to restore OWEB's base budget, including contract services and the additional staffing positions in package 100.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,



Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts



Vanessa Green, Executive Director, Network of Oregon Watershed Councils



Jan Lee, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts