



Testimony on Department of Environmental Quality 2021-2023 Budget HB 5516 and HB 5517

April 12, 2021

Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the budget for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). DEQ has several programs that deeply impact our membership, so we have a vested interest in DEQ's budget for key program areas.

By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is Oregon's largest grassroots agriculture association, representing nearly 7,000 farming and ranching families across the state. Our mission is to promote educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement for our members and the farming, ranching, and natural resources industry as a whole. Agriculture contributes an estimated \$50 billion dollars to the state's economy, making it Oregon's second largest economic driver. Given the importance of DEQ's program areas to all of Oregon's 220+ commodities, we have a strong interest in ensuring that DEQ's work focuses on the agency's core programs and does not create unnecessary work or jurisdictional confusion for our members.

Given DEQ's large breadth of program areas, we understand how difficult it is for the agency, the governor's office and the legislature to assess relative priorities between DEQ's programs. With that said, we are concerned about a number of places where the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) proposes cuts to core program areas, while ramping up program costs in other areas that may be better addressed by other agencies.

On the cuts side, the **agency is proposing a cut of \$311,326 to defund groundwater tracking** within the groundwater management area (GWMA) program. This is following on the heels of years of cuts to the groundwater quality program, such that the agency is not making any meaningful progress on addressing groundwater quality issues outside of designated GWMA's, nor has the agency moved forward with designation of additional GWMA's. The agricultural community stands ready to participate in investigating and addressing the causes of any groundwater issues in the state, but cannot do so in the face of a significantly under resourced program. We implore the state not to wait until there is a flashpoint issue around groundwater quality before it begins the long, resource intensive, but ultimately necessary process of understanding and addressing the causes of groundwater quality issues around the state.

We are also aware that the agency has been ordered to complete a large number of temperature total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) around the state in the coming years and is requesting **2 positions through POP 121 to kick off that work**. While we support DEQ having adequate resources to make the necessary investments in completing the TMDL work and undertaking the myriad of conversations that need to happen for that process to roll out successfully, we strongly encourage the legislature not to lose sight of the fact that a significant part of TMDL implementation is done by other agencies. For example, the Oregon Department of Agriculture is the “designated management agency” for implementation of TMDLs on agricultural lands, and is also facing massive cuts across their water quality program. We must ensure that all agencies charged with protecting our state’s water quality and implementing TMDLs are adequately resourced to keep up with the significant increase in workload the program will see in the coming years.

Given the significant core program work that is already facing resource constraints, we are concerned that the agency continues to invest significant resources in the development of the “cap and reduce” program and proposes an **additional \$2 million for its climate protection work**. Given that climate change is an international issue best addressed by national policy and federal treaties, and given that the Biden Administration has an incredibly proactive climate agenda, we urge the legislature and the agency to reinvest those dollars in core program areas and leave climate policy to Congress and the federal agencies implementing President Biden’s most recent executive orders.

Finally, we are concerned about the proposed cost shifts in the GRB, particularly to implement **the EDMS system, which is found in POP 141 and SB 58**. As you are aware, COVID-19 has created an unprecedented economic and public health crisis in Oregon. This crisis has forced many of the industries in our state to focus their attention on complying with physical distancing mandates and new workplace restrictions while also trying to find ways to stay afloat amid such a sudden decline in sales and liquidity. Industries regulated by DEQ are struggling to stay afloat, and cannot afford cost increases at this time, particularly to create a Cadillac data management system when we understand a less costly system would have met EPA’s mandate.

Thank you for your consideration.

Oregon Farm Bureau

Oregonians for Food & Shelter

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