



Testimony on 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 Seed Council (OSC) represents Oregon's world renowned seed industry, with nearly 1,500 farming families and seed companies across the state. The seed industry contributes more than a billion dollars to the state's economy, making it one of Oregon's agricultural commodities largest economic driver. Given the importance of DEQ's program areas 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 several 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 GWMAs, nor has the agency moved forward with designation of additional GWMAs. The seed industry 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 issues 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 many 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 avoiding cuts in core program areas and leave climate policy to Congress and the federal agencies implementing President Biden's most recent executive orders.

Thank you for your consideration.

Oregon Seed Council

Contact: Roger Beyer, roger@rwbeyer.com, 503-519-5285 cell