



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

April 21, 2021

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Sen. Kathleen Taylor and Rep. Jeff Reardon, Co-Chairs
Members of the Subcommittee

Re: **SB 5502** – Dept. of Agriculture Budget – **Support**

The League has strong positions related to protecting agricultural lands, to assuring abundant clean water for all, assuring our public facilities are not damaged by invasive species (which would cost us all millions) and that government has the responsibility for public safety. Just like other state public safety programs, our food safety programs are critical to Oregonians' health and wellbeing. Climate change is an existential threat to Oregon so the League has prioritized addressing actions on this critical issue as we do in this budget. On the basis of an in-depth [study](#) on farmworkers done in 2000, *we believe in the public benefit from the agricultural bounty produced by Oregon's farmers and farmworkers, and that the state has a role in supporting the sound and fair relationship between farmers and the agricultural workforce, with the goal of economic and social justice for both parties.*

With those positions in mind, we provide comments on the following Policy Option Packages (POPs):

POP 090: We are concerned and do NOT support elimination of support for Oregon's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (\$317,594 LF). These groups will be important as we move toward more climate-friendly agricultural practices as well as continuing work on water quality. **We are also concerned by the proposed elimination of the Farm Mediation Program (\$102,740 GF)** since the activities that might be eliminated include offering a voluntary and confidential process to assist with disputes between agricultural employers and employees. At the time of our study in 2000 the ODA program was handling "....40 to 50 cases since its inception in 1996 and had a high rate of resolution."

We continue to support the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership program and are not supportive of the vacancy savings in the Natural Resources program (\$157,157 GF) and two Water Quality positions (\$256,949 GF/\$188,009 OF).

A review of the total proposed eliminations list provided by the Governor's budget should be done in light of our current fiscal position. **As discussed in the agency's budget hearing, due to the reliance by the agency on fees and Other Funds, finding the 10% reduction required by the legislature often requires an offering to the cuts list of really critical agency programs due to their reliance on General Funds.**

POP 099: We support the Microsoft 365 Consolidation (\$68,328 GF/\$28,473 LF/\$262,248 OF) since providing information technology is, as with other agencies, critical to their efficiency and to the public's access to important data.

POP 120: Again, IT Modernization is important for efficiency and for access to data. The request in the Agency Request Budget was for 5 positions and we trust the State Data Information Office and Legislative IT Office will help in determining the appropriate staffing to move this project forward. (\$981,976 GF)

We will not comment on the POPs related to fee changes, but assume stakeholders and the public's voice will be heard as you consider these changes. We support the public health and safety inspection programs. When the state determines the need for oversight, the public's interest should be paramount - meaning that the public should have some responsibility to help pay for those inspections to assure the public's voice is heard.

POP 110: We know the work done by the department's staff during the Covid and wildfire crises was critical, but we hope Ways and Means will consider this in relation to the possible restructure of the Office of Emergency Management and if the potential new regional positions in OEM might be sufficient to help ODA in this area. If not, then funding should be considered.

POP 130: We fully support SB 286 and the creation of a new Environmental Justice Council and ask that you consider this position as you review the entire group of requests around assuring diversity, equity and inclusion throughout our Natural Resource agencies.

POP 140: We support the Internal Auditor position, particularly as this agency is required to depend more and more on fees. All Oregonians, including fee payers, need to feel that monies spent by this agency are used in the best possible manner for Oregon agriculture and for Oregonian's public health and safety.

POP 340: We support the Water Quality Improvement Work in Strategic Areas (SIAs) in the Agency Request Budget for one position and contract resources. (\$883,374 LF)

POP 350: We support Groundwater Quality Work related to the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) and note that work is needed in all the GWMA designated areas and those places where groundwater may be contaminated. The use of fertilizer, although sometimes important to growing crops, also has a climate impact, which is why the following two POPs are important.

POP 365 and 370: We support the Soil Health Position (4213,374 GF) in the Agency Request Budget AND getting a Baseline Soil Health Assessment (\$225,000 GF) as in the Governor's Request Budget. Both are important as we address our natural and working lands contribution to reducing carbon emissions. Healthy soils keep cropland productive, hold more moisture, provide natural pest and disease prevention benefits, keep cropland resilient in the face of natural disasters, and help protect air and water quality. Changes to agricultural management through no-till, cover crops, and nitrogen management, with greenhouse gas emission reductions primarily attributed to increased cover crops. Despite evidence that cover crops can provide both environmental and yield benefits, less than 2% of Oregon's total cropland is currently planted to cover crops.

POP 320: We support the Worker Protection Standard Position (\$229,935 OF) to provide for education, training and technical assistance regarding the rights and responsibilities of agricultural employers and employees. We support our agricultural economy and recognize the value of our farmworkers. It is well known that farm work is among the most dangerous work that is fraught with the potential for accidents and special health risks. We join with the Oregon Nurseries Association in supporting this POP.

POP 360: We support continuation of the Klamath Water Quality Improvement Work (\$75,000 GF). As the Klamath is again in drought territory, working with farmers and others in assuring that the limited water available is of high quality will be critical in the coming months.

POP 461: We support the legislature's policy of requiring at least 2% of current replacement value for deferred maintenance (\$51,274 OF). For too long we have allowed agencies to continue to defer needed maintenance to the point where the cost of repair or replacement exceeds regular maintenance costs.

League members enjoy the bounty provided by the wide variety of Oregon's commodities. **Oregon agriculture is the most stable of Oregon's economies.** We encourage the Legislature to support the work of this agency and consider our comments as you develop the final budgets for our natural resource agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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