



April 18, 2023

TO: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
FROM: Kate Fitzpatrick, Executive Director, Deschutes River Conservancy
RE: Support for Drought Relief and Water Security Package

Dear Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Owens and Hartman, and Members of the Committee:

The Deschutes River Conservancy (DRC) was formed in 1996 by the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, irrigation, and environmental interests. The DRC's mission is to restore streamflow and water quality in the Deschutes Basin using collaborative approaches that support the diverse uses of water in the basin. The DRC and its partners have restored significant flows to our basin's rivers while supporting out-of-stream community uses of water.

The DRC would like to commend the co-chairs of the Committee in bringing forward a comprehensive water investment package at a time when increased investment in water is critical for the future of all Oregonians. The DRC supports many components of this package. At the statewide level, we lend overarching support for the investments in the agency capacity and data generation necessary to support sound water management. We also enthusiastically support investments in fish passage (5-1); watershed resiliency (5-4); and continued investment in OWEB and OWRD grant programs (5-3 and 6-5).

We would like to specifically call out and summarize an integrated subset of funding components that advances strategies to address instream and out-of-stream needs in the Deschutes Basin. This package of investments in the Deschutes would leverage unprecedented funding at a critical time when the basin is working to meet ambitious instream flow targets as part of the Deschutes Basin Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), as well as important goals for fish and wildlife beyond the HCP. This list constitutes an integrated approach that supports multiple implementation tools, as well as the processes that will ensure implementation is broadly supported and can accelerate at optimal levels.

- **6-1, Irrigation Modernization Match for Federal Funds.** Match funds are critical for continued large-scale canal piping conservation projects in the Deschutes that are restoring significant flows to the basin. This is a proven and successful tool that has restored over 150 cubic feet per second to the basin to date. The Deschutes irrigation districts have the opportunity to leverage once-in-a-generation levels of federal funding over the next biennium if State match is available.

We recommend that "Irrigation Modernization" project implementation funding only be available to applicants that use the Allocation of Conserved Water Program (or equivalent protections) to legally protect a portion of the conserved water instream; or

provide equivalent measurable environmental benefits, ensuring public benefit for public funds.

- **5-9, Deschutes Drought Resiliency and Watershed Restoration.** Integrating water marketing, increased water measurement, on-farm efficiency upgrades, and habitat restoration is the most effective way to complement large-scale canal piping to meet the flow and watershed needs in the Deschutes. This investment ensures that we accelerate this work at a critical time and leverages available federal funding. Packaging these activities with piping increases the cost-effectiveness of the whole investment as well as the timeliness of outcomes.
- **1-10, Development of a Deschutes Basin Integrated Water Plan.** The Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative is midway through Plan development, in line with the State's Place-Based Planning Guidelines and the Integrated Water Resources Strategy. The Collaborative needs continued investment to ensure this plan gets completed and implemented. The Plan provides a roadmap for how to most effectively integrate canal piping, on-farm efficiency upgrades, water marketing activities, and habitat restoration in the Upper Deschutes Basin to meet goals as quickly and cost effectively as possible. Having a consensus-based Plan ensures broad support for implementation.
- **5-8, Studying Springs in the Deschutes Basin.** Additional information on springs and cold water refugia is important for ongoing discussions and decision-making around conjunctive surface and groundwater management actions in the Deschutes. Sound information benefits management decisions that impact rivers, aquifers, and out-of-stream uses.
- **1-4, related to Increased Tribal Engagement in Water.** The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs are water management and planning leaders in the Deschutes. The tribes' ability to continue to fully engage is critical to basin success.

Many partners in the Deschutes are collaborating intensively to increase the pace and scale of water management projects to restore our ecosystems and sustain agricultural and community water needs. These efforts are broadly supported and cross partisan divides. They meet instream and out-of-stream needs. They demonstrate the strength of the Deschutes Basin's community approach. But this work needs to accelerate in the context of continued drought, critical species and ecosystem needs, and risks to agriculture. The combination of investments bulleted above ensures that the Deschutes Basin can achieve these goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. A bold investment in water now will help ensure that Oregon remains a livable, desirable, and sustainable place into the future.

Sincerely,



Kate Fitzpatrick
Executive Director