

April 17, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Testimony in support of HB 3124: Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package

Submitted by: Zach Freed, Sustainable Water Program Director

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

Thank you for your leadership on HB 3124, the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security (BiDRAWS) Package. **The Nature Conservancy supports the investments in the BiDRAWS Package**, which will benefit both nature and people.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber interests, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

Water management in Oregon has been historically underfunded, resulting in decreased agency capacity, limited collaborative planning processes, and insufficient data for responsible management. This underinvestment has spurred water conflicts, aquifer declines, increased insecurity for domestic water supplies, and imperiled ecosystems. Investments in the 2021-2023 biennium have begun to make substantial progress, but a recent Oregon Secretary of State Advisory Report¹ drew the clear conclusion that more work needs to be done. The BiDRAWS Package will build upon and leverage prior investments to proactively mitigate the impacts of future drought.

Continued investments in capturing water data are desperately needed to inform responsible water management actions. Similarly, ensuring sufficient capacity to implement on-the-ground actions in state agencies is critical to address the Secretary of State Advisory Report conclusion that "...natural resource agencies lack funding and capacity to properly enact their duties." TNC supports continued investments towards collaborative planning efforts that benefit communities, such as the Harney Basin Community-Based Water Planning Collaborative.

The Nature Conservancy supports these key package components:

- **#1-3:** Community funding and agency capacity for Place-Based Integrated Water Resources Planning

¹ Oregon Secretary of State Report [2023-04](#), January 2023.

- **#1-14:** Increasing OWRD field staff capacity
- **#2-4:** Increasing water use measurement and reporting
- **#2-6:** Instream flow studies, coldwater refugia, and stream temperature monitoring
- **#2-7:** Statewide stream and groundwater monitoring

Drought and flooding are projected to become more frequent in Oregon's changing climate and water policies need to respond to these changes. These investments will help Oregonians, along with fish and wildlife, adapt to a future with more extreme weather.

We urge you to support the funding within the BiDRAWS Package, especially the high-priority package components described above.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.