



April 6, 2023

To Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: **Support HB 5043 – Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) Budget**

Chair Dembrow and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD supports full funding for OWRD. It is well understood that good management of our water resources is essential to the future of our State. OWRD is a central Department in this mission with a good track record of accomplishments in the face of funding that is insufficient to do what is expected to carry us into the future.

We actively participated in the process to prepare the Department recommendation for the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB). Some of the most critical Policy Option Packages (POPs) that are in the GRB include:

- Package 101 – Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS)
- Package 105 – American Rescue Plan Act Carry Over
- Package 107 – Feasibility Studies, Water Projects, & Wells
- Package 108 – Water Rights and Protest Backlog Reduction
- Package 111 – Water Use, Supply, and Availability Data
- Package 115 – Complex Water Issues (substantially reduced from Department recommendation)

Unfortunately, there were reductions and POPs that did not make it from the Department recommendations into the GRB. Significant reductions of concern included vacancy savings, outreach and facilitation for complex projects, groundwater study, observation wells, gaging stations, and watermasters. These reductions impact the

ability to understand and evaluate the condition of our water resources and manage them in an appropriate manner.

There were also important POPs that did not make it into the GRB including the following:

- Package 104 – Information Technology Modernization.
- Package 106 – Water Planning
- Package 109 – Climate Change and Drought
- Package 114 – Watermaster Staffing
- Package 115 – Resolution of Complex Issues (not fully included in GRB)
- Package 118 – Lake Abert Watershed (Chewaucan Basin)
- Package 120 – Data Accuracy and Availability

There are many important water-related bills with fiscal impact that are in the process of working through the legislature that should be passed and funded. Some of these bills are related to agency reductions and POPs that did not make it into the GRB. Some of the most important bills include:

- HB 3100A – Integrated Water Resources Strategy. This is central document in setting the State's course for water management and funding is needed to assure that this can continue to be an excellent guide for our future. The bill establishes new requirements for the IWRS, so funding for this bill should be in addition to POP 101.
- HB 3124 – Water Package. This bill is expected to pick up a long list of activities that are worthy of funding. One high priority example is irrigation modernization.
- HB 3163 – Place Based Planning Fund. This new direction in figuring how best to manage water on a basin level should be promoted. It could help fill the deficit in needs that could have been filled with POP 106.
- HB 3099 – Management in the Chewaucan Basin. Funding is needed to develop solutions to water scarcity in this critical basin. This bill would offset the fact that POP 118 did not get included in the GRB.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.



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