



April 5, 2023

Senator Michael Dembrow, Co-Chair
Representative Khanh Pham, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: Input on WRD Budget (HB 5043)

Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited (TU) is a non-profit organization dedicated to conserving cold-water fish (such as trout, salmon, and steelhead) and their habitats. TU has more than 350,000 members and supporters nationwide, including many members in Oregon.

TU participated in WRD's stakeholder meetings held over the past year related to crafting the next biennium's budget.

HB 5043 appropriates money from the General Fund to the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD) for certain biennial expenses.

Trout Unlimited supports providing funding for POP 111 in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB), but we also recommend adding funds for POPs 114 and 119 (which are not in the GRB).

Item in GRB that TU Supports

TU supports POP 111 (Water Use, Supply, and Availability Data), which is included in the GRB,¹ *but only at about 60% of the amount requested.*

POP 111 in the agency request budget (ARB)² would have provided \$2,209,905 in General Fund (including 6.87 FTE) for several initiatives at WRD including key updates to the state's Water Availability Reporting System (WARS), maintaining a stream gage network for quantifying water supplies, and expanding the Agrimet Network in Oregon to improve water demand and use data. The GRB funded this POP at approximately \$1.3 million (with 3.26 FTE).

TU asks the Subcommittee to keep POP 111 in the legislative budget, but to top it up to the amount requested in the ARB. Doing so will help WRD to achieve its intended results for POP 111, which

¹ See WRD, Governor's Recommended 2023-2025 Budget Summary, at page 2, available at https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/programs/policylawandrules/LegislativeAndBudget/Documents/WRD_2023_2025_GRB_Summary.pdf.

² See WRD, 2023-2025 Agency Request Budget POPs, at page 42, available at https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/WRDReports/2023_25_Agency_Request_Budget_PolicyOptionPackages.pdf.

include more accurate representations of water availability (that consider climate change) to avoid further over-appropriation of Oregon's water resources.

Items Not in GRB that TU Recommends Funding

Trout Unlimited recommends that the Subcommittee support funding for the following items, which are not in the GRB:

1. **Water Master Staff: Improving Water Management (POP 114 in ARB)**

POP 114 requested \$1,606,221 (including 5.53 FTE) for additional field staff to respond to water management needs. Simply put, WRD needs additional water masters to help equitably allocate water resources and provide services to rural communities, especially in high workload basins such as the Klamath Basin and Malheur Lakes Basin. Increasing WRD's field capacity is consistent with Recommendation G of the 2016 Drought Task Force report.³

2. **Studying Springs in Deschutes Basin (119 in ARB)**

POP 119 requested \$612,418 (including 1.76 FTE) to study surface water springs in the Deschutes basin. The Deschutes basin includes some of the most beloved rivers (and economically productive recreational fisheries) in the state of Oregon. In recent years, some of the surface water springs—including those in the Metolius River watershed—have declined in productivity.⁴ TU supports this POP because, according to WRD's agency request budget, the funding would allow OWRD to (1) determine high-value ecological springs, (2) understand the sources and fluxes of water in those springs, and (3) understand the magnitude and causes of those changes in the springs and their sources.

Drought Package

WRD's POPs 114 and 119 are currently proposed as line items in HB 3124 (the "Drought Package").⁵ TU supports including these WRD POPs in the Drought Package, but we wish to raise and support the opportunity to include it in WRD's budget bill, too.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments, and please let me know if you have questions.

Sincerely,

James Fraser
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³ See Report of the Task Force on Drought Emergency Response, House Bill 4113 (2016), at page 21 (available at: https://www.oregon.gov/owrd/WRDReports/DO_Drought_Emergency_Response_Task_Force_Report_11_1_2016.pdf).

⁴ See Michael Kohn, *Drought taking toll on head of the Metolius River*, Bend Bulletin, August 7, 2021 (available at: https://www.bendbulletin.com/localstate/environment/drought-taking-toll-on-head-of-the-metolius-river/article_317be884-f56c-11eb-9381-830d4e701ee9.html).

⁵ See Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security Package (BiDRAWS) spreadsheet, HB 3124 Meeting Material for 3/16/23 meeting of House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water, at components #1-14 and #5-8 (available at <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/265282>).