

DATE: April 7, 2023

TO: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Co-Chair Dembrow
Co-Chair Pham
Senator Anderson
Senator Frederick

Representative Holvey
Representative Bobby Levy
Representative Emerson Levy
Representative Owens

FROM: Oregon Water Partnership

RE: **HB 5043 (OWRD 2023-25 Budget)** – Water management for a sustainable future

Co-Chair Dembrow, Co-Chair Pham, and Members of the Committee,

Oregon Water Partnership (OWP) supports investments in foundational water management and a modern understanding of water availability to enable Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) to accomplish its mission.

We are a diverse partnership of statewide conservation groups with a common goal: to advocate for balanced water policies that ensure cold clean water to sustain healthy communities, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Our priorities for the 2023 legislative session are to build resilience for Oregon's water future, bring water data into the 21st century, support smart water management, and protect and restore our waters.

Underinvestment and lack of capacity within Oregon Water Resources Department has led to over-allocation of water rights, with resulting threats to fish and wildlife, safe and secure access to drinking water, and agricultural economies. As drought and flooding become more frequent and precipitation patterns shift across the state, water management is becoming more complex and contentious.

We have reviewed OWRD's Agency Request Budget and the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB). We have also offered [coalition input on HB 3124](#), the Bipartisan Drought Relief and Water Security (BiDRAWS) Package, as well as on many of the policy concepts it contains. While each of our organizations has its own priorities and perspectives on other components of OWRD's 2023-25 budget, **we are united in supporting the following investments to benefit nature and people in Oregon:**

- **POP 111: Water Use, Supply, and Availability Data (Partially funded in GRB)** – We urge full funding for capacity within OWRD to modernize the state's online tool for understanding of water availability. With full funding, this investment will protect against further over-allocation of water rights and mitigate future water conflict by developing a transparent, publicly-available water availability assessment that can be improved as new data become available. Without full funding, the water availability tool update will be delayed and critically outdated IT systems will not be fixed, yielding a one-time update.
- **POP 114: Watermaster Staff: Improving Water Management (Not included in GRB)** – POP 114 provides critical capacity for on-the-ground staff to measure water use, enforce regulations, and act as a liaison between the agency and communities.
- **POP 119: Studying Springs in the Deschutes Basin (Not included in GRB)** – Springs are among the most biodiverse and climate-resilient habitats in all of Oregon. They are the interface between groundwater and surface water, and provide ecologically and economically important late-season flows in the Deschutes River and its tributaries. This investment enables the agency to understand impacts of drought and groundwater withdrawal on the spring flow that supports the Deschutes River.



- **No reductions to OWRD’s Current Service Level** – A recent Advisory Report by Oregon’s Secretary of State concluded that “...natural resource agencies lack funding and capacity to properly enact their duties.”¹ Now is not the time to reduce capacity within OWRD.

We believe the investments identified above are consistent with the 2023-25 Co-Chair Budget Framework general principles to Protect Vital Services, Get the Most for Every Dollar, Prioritize Investments in Key Areas, and Plan for the Future. Robust funding for the Water Program also meets the specific Natural Resources program area framework, ensuring “the continuation of existing critical programs and services” and targeting “any available resources for the Natural Resources program area in climate resilience, including wildfire and drought.”

Funding these items will leverage and build upon prior investments in the agency, and help OWRD achieve its goals to “directly address Oregon’s water supply needs” and “restore and protect streamflows and watersheds to ensure the long-term sustainability of Oregon’s ecosystems, economy, and quality of life.”

Members of OWP have supported various investments at OWRD during the 2021 Regular Session related to improving the agency’s data and capacity for water management (e.g., funding for water availability assessments and science for groundwater and springs in HB 2018; increased capacity for water management per SB 5545 and HB 5006). **We strongly support funding that will build upon these prior investments.**

Thank you for considering our request to fund these critical needs, and please contact us if you have any questions.

Oregon Water Partnership

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