



April 13, 2023

To: Joint Subcommittee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

RE: Support for SB5539– Support for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board 2023-2025 Budget

Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow and Representative Pham and Members of the Committee:

Ducks Unlimited, Inc (DU) **conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl.** These habitats benefit water, fish, other wildlife, and people. DU has in depth knowledge of landowners' and farmers' goals. Additionally, DU staff form trusting relationships to achieve desired outcomes for their families and property. We assist our partners in creating and achieving visions now and for the future through easements, planning, management, and restoration.

OWEB is an agency critical to the conservation of the State of Oregon's important habitat. DU and OWEB have a long, strong partnership working collaboratively to protect habitat for fish and wildlife and our natural resources through voluntary conservation measures. Therefore, DU supports Senate Bills 5539 and 5540 that bolsters OWEB operational needs and grant programs. OWEB funding is critical for leveraging both private and federal dollars to achieve shared missions. Funding SB5539 would be an important step towards solidifying OWEB's ability to leverage other non-state conservation federal funding. There are many federal funding sources that cannot be properly utilized in Oregon because of limited ability of state funding leverage.

DU voices our support of Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) and OWEB in their goals to support farmers' and other private landowners' efforts for implementing sound land management opportunities, preserving agriculture, and enhancing habitat. DU strongly believes OAHP is an essential tool to assist Oregon's private land conservation efforts.

DU supports fully funding the OAHP within OWEB's budget to help farmers and ranchers protect their land from fragmentation and development, while keeping it in production and benefiting local economies and communities. We respectfully ask that this committee consider **including \$10 million in grants and \$800,000 in administration funding requested by OWEB for the 2023-2025 biennium as proposed in the OWEB Agency Requested Budget (ARB) and in HB3366.**

In 2022, the legislature provided the first \$5 million for this program- and it's working! DU currently has a project near Eugene, Oregon that is recommended for funding by OAHP. In partnership with the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), we are using federal and state funds to leverage more work on the ground. Without either of these funding sources, the likelihood of the project's success decreases substantially. Once this project is fully funded, landowners will be able to utilize the money from conservation easements to focus efforts on his high value farmland. DU and other partners will focus restoration efforts on areas that are wet and challenging to farm. OAHP will provide a sustainable source of state matching funds to protect our agricultural and ranch land across Oregon.



DU has identified OAHP as a funding source for several additional projects that best fit landowner and farmers' needs. Although OAHP is a young program, its applicability, and benefits now and in the future are evident for Oregon and its farmers, natural resource partners, fish, wildlife, and habitat.

In addition, the program provides funding for conservation management planning, technical assistance, and succession planning to support our farmers and ranchers.

We respectfully request that the co-chairs and members support this bill, and we would appreciate the opportunity to testify.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeffrey McCreary", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jeffrey McCreary
Director of Operations – Western Region
Ducks Unlimited Inc