



Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources

RE: SB 5539 and SB 5540

Dear Co-Chair Pham, Co-Chair Dembrow, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the members of the Board and staff of McKenzie River Trust, I encourage your support for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's proposed 2023-2025 operating budget, including the unspent wildfire recovery balances as well as the funds allocated for grant distribution. You will note that we are also signers on a letter submitted by a larger coalition of organizations encouraging this same support. I will also make comments to the committee remotely during the April 20 hearing.

Those partnership letters and others testifying at the hearing will describe well the context within which we are putting dollars to ground on projects that enhance fish and wildlife habitats, help communities thrive, and respond to major wildfires. That context is complex, and putting dollars to ground takes time and creativity. The success of Oregon's land use system ensures that we do not rush into things. The challenge of Oregon's land use system is that we cannot often move quickly to address community needs. But we cannot and are not backing away from this complexity. We must embrace it.

In the aftermath of the September 2020 Holiday Farm Fire, we continue to learn about the interconnections of forest health, river health, and community health. Fire behavior, the threat and reality of landslides and debris flows, flood impacts, the extent of water supply and other infrastructure vulnerability- all of these are woven together across the land, influenced by how we manage it, how we care for it. It has been reassuring this last decade especially to experience increased collaboration not only in the non-profit sector, but also across the state natural resource agencies. Investment of general fund dollars in these agency programs have an outsized impact on the ground when that collaboration occurs. OWEB's initial leadership in the water vision process has helped invigorate that collaboration, and it is beginning to play out in on the ground projects throughout the state. Similarly, the ability for agencies including OWEB to shift its programs toward urgent needs in fire-affected communities speaks to its leadership.

You are in a position on Ways and Means to reinforce that message: investment in natural resource agency capacity underpins a more resilient Oregon. I encourage you to do so by recommending the budget for OWEB as characterized in SB 5539 and SB 5540. I ask that you also support efforts that encourage further collaboration across the natural resource agencies as well. Thank you for your consideration and your leadership.

Sincerely,

Joe Moll
Executive Director

Protecting Special Lands

120 Shelton McMurfhey Blvd, St. 270 • Eugene, OR 97401 • *phone* (541) 345-2799 • *fax* (541) 465-3876 • www.mckenzieriver.org