



Wasco County Soil & Water Conservation District

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April 19, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
From: Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District

Re: SB 5540 – Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board 2023-2025 Budget

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

The Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) in partnership with the Wasco County Area Watershed Councils strongly support the work of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and the funding support provided through their programs. We encourage you to pass SB 5540 funding grants and capacity for special projects as part of OWEB's budget.

The partnership between the SWCD and Watershed Councils is vital in the effort to enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by providing technical services and supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners. Both Wasco County SWCD and the area Watershed Councils receive capacity support from OWEB and have implemented numerous grants dating back to 1990 when OWEB was known as the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board (GWEB).

These projects have ranged from full-scale water restoration projects to small grants provided to individual landowners to address site-specific resource concerns. Promoting voluntary conservation through grants and cost share is critical to helping protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies. Most recently, we have been implementing both upland habitat restoration and riparian projects to conserve soil and water and enhance the resource base. These projects promote local agricultural sustainability and enhance resiliency for terrestrial species and native cold water fish species in the face of climate change and drought conditions.

Dollars leveraged through the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) allows us the ability to work with landowners to protect fish, wildlife and habitat on working lands. The approval of this budget will maximize the use of federal dollars in Oregon and promote voluntary conservation action while promoting the enhancement of Oregon's watersheds.

The Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) sustains the essential investments made to re-establish Soil and Water Conservation Districts capacity and special program funding

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in the 2023-2025 biennium, which provides much needed staff capacity as well as address the needs of Oregon's fish and wildlife populations, and watersheds. SWCDs throughout the state coordinate with our federal and local partners on initiatives to implement private lands habitat conservation and stewardship on farms, ranches, and forests. The expertise provided by our partners and staff ensures that habitat projects with landowners achieve results in line with the recommendations in the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds.

The 2023-25 biennium capacity investments to OWEB ensure that HB 5540 will provide funds to continue the successful implementation of restoration and enhancement throughout Oregon. We urge the Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources to pass SB 5540, continuing to bolster Soil and Water Conservation Districts' ability to address the challenges to habitat, watersheds and conservation in Oregon.

Sincerely,



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