



NETWORK of OREGON  
WATERSHED COUNCILS

April 20th, 2023

To: The Oregon Legislature Joint Committee on Natural Resources

From: Vanessa Green, Executive Director, Network of Oregon Watershed Councils

Re: Watershed Councils support the proposed 2023 OWEB Budget

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Good afternoon Natural Resources Committee, Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham,

For the record, my name is Vanessa Green, I serve as Executive Director for the [Network of Oregon Watershed Councils](#), known as NOWC. **I'm here today to support Senate Bill 5539, the OWEB budget**

Since 1997, the Oregon legislature has passed several statutes to encourage local governments to form watershed councils, and to direct the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to support them. NOWC represents 55 watershed councils across the state – rural and urban, east side and west side. Each watershed council is established, recognized and serves in our local communities, and our governing boards represent the diverse interests in each of our service areas. We are familiar with our particular ecological habitats, and work to understand and address specific challenges, usually focusing on rivers or creeks and the lands that drain into them.

Because we are not regulatory organizations, we are well-positioned to serve as a bridge between local landowners and communities with state and federal agencies. We develop long-term collaborations that are prepared to work together in complex and large-scale ways to voluntarily restore and enhance some of the most important habitats for our native species.

Watershed Council strengths lie in our ability to be nimble as we adapt and lead in evolving situations, such as responding to and recovering from wildfires. Through restoration projects, we help Oregon to respond to and plan for climate change, we remove invasive weeds that burn hot and bright, we plant native species that are drought resistant. We build out artificial beaver dams, restore floodplains, and improve fish passages, which create water storage and cooling opportunities and benefit endangered salmon and steelhead. We also engage in longer-term efforts, like replacing tide gates, removing dams, and assessing and monitoring environmental conditions year-over-year.

As you know, successful projects can take years to develop and watershed councils rely on OWEB, as a key partner, to support our restoration projects, our community engagement and our organizational capacity. I want to take a moment to focus on the importance of OWEB's capacity grants for watershed councils – unlike project grants, offered through OWEB and other state and federal agencies, which support specific restoration activities – OWEB capacity grants support costs associated with supporting professional people running efficient small community organizations according to best practices. Many watershed councils use their capacity grants to provide staff salaries, pay the rent, and provide the time it takes to build relationships and develop effective projects – strategic plans, doodle polls, zoom meetings, iterative drafts, site visits, cups of coffee, all of that methodical underwork that supports our ability to be nimble and adaptive. We also leverage the capacity grants as match for other grant opportunities, multiplying their effect. OWEB capacity grants are valued and essential to watershed councils' ability to effectively serve our communities and advance Oregon's natural resource plans.

For all of these reasons, **NOWC supports Senate Bill 5539, the OWEB budget. We ask that you fund the proposed policy option packages that will support their organizational capacity and ability to effectively partner with watershed councils across the state.**

Thank you for your consideration,



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