



4145 NE Cully Blvd., Portland, OR, 97630 | 503-290-8570

February 18, 2025

To: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

RE: Support HB 3528 - Water Equity Fund

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Rose Poton and I am the Water Justice Coordinator at Verde. Verde is a community-based organization whose mission is to build environmental wealth through organizing, advocacy, and social enterprise. We are writing to express strong support for [HB 3528](#) Water Equity Fund, a critical step in addressing Oregon's water challenges for all Oregonians.

Since 2021, Verde has spoken with many legislators in the building and on this committee advocating for the Water Equity Fund. Additionally, when speaking with community members, we continue to hear from Oregonians about the urgency of addressing our water challenges. The message is clear: we need long-term, community-driven solutions to ensure all Oregonians have access to clean, safe, and affordable water.

Verde has engaged with community members across Oregon through our partnership with the Oregon Water Futures Collaborative. Through community events and interviews, we have heard from over 200 Oregonians about their water priorities. A major highlight of those conversations is community empowerment. The idea and materialization of the Water Equity Fund has come directly from community members across the state. Our engagements have informed the language, advocacy, and implementation of the fund. Without the voices, knowledge, and experience of those most affected, water investments will continue to perpetuate injustices and miss opportunities to incorporate community strength and creativity.

Water Equity Fund Aligns with State Priorities on Environmental Justice

The Water Equity Fund represents a groundbreaking investment in Oregon's communities, addressing water inequities through community-led solutions. Building on [SB 5506 \(2023\)](#) and aligning with [SCR 17 \(2021\)](#), past Water Equity Funds supported projects that directly benefited communities tackling issues like drought, flooding, pollution, and rising utility costs.

Frontline communities—Black, Indigenous, Native, migrant, undocumented, rural and low-income households, and communities of color—are on the frontlines of water inequities and are disproportionately impacted. These communities face escalating utility rates, heightened exposure to pollutants, and increasing vulnerability to droughts, floods and other extreme weather events. Addressing these disparities requires a commitment to equitable water investments and meaningful community engagement in water planning and decision-making.



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In 2025, the fund will continue to support communities and legislators by offering public educational materials and establishing a research and educational space to drive community-led innovations for equitable access to clean, safe, and affordable water statewide.

Strengthen Scientific Research for Informed Policy and Action

- The [Climate Solutions Center at the University of Oregon](#) will use \$3.2 million to conduct research on water challenges in environmental justice communities, leading to data-driven solutions.
- The [Institute for Tribal Government at Portland State University](#) will receive \$800,000 to conduct similar research focused on the water needs of tribal communities, ensuring culturally informed approaches.

On the Ground Impact

Previous allocations from the Water Equity Fund have already made a significant impact by funding projects that address key water justice issues, including affordability, education, infrastructure resilience, and emergency preparedness. For instance, the fund has supported Indigenous water stewardship, funded positions in tribal organizations, and helped preserve traditional ecological knowledge, as seen with the Necanicum Watershed Council's new Tribal Lands and Water Steward role. For Verde, this fund supported us in expanding outreach and educational opportunities. We brought community members from across Oregon to the State Capitol building to introduce them to their legislators, experience the decision making process first hand, and to strengthen relationships across the state.

By approving [HB 3528](#), Oregon will not only invest in long-term solutions that protect public health, economic stability, and environmental sustainability but also puts power and investments directly into the hands of community members across the state—ensuring they have the resources and decision-making influence to address their local water challenges.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Roselyn Poton, Water Justice Coordinator
Verde