



February 19, 2025

To Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: **Support SB 5543 – Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) Budget**

Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

OACD supports full funding for OWRD. Good management of our water resources is essential to the future of our State, and we are experiencing the consequences of decades of underfunding OWRD. There is a substantial backlog of important work and there is inadequate data and information to properly manage our water resources. Furthermore, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, the blueprint for our water future, has many tasks that must be done but cannot be done under the current levels of funding. The Governors Recommended Budget (GRB) does not address the true needs, rather it continues the practice of underfunding.

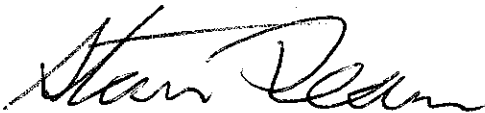
The GRB includes important Policy Option Packages (POPs), and we feel they need to move forward, including the omitted POP 101. An unfortunate exception is that there are significant reductions in Package 90 that must be reinstated for the agency to do what is required. We request that the following reductions be reinstated:

- OWRD must be able to collect data and make it available for use. We recommend adding back evapotranspiration funding (\$114K), Agrimet funding (\$100K), gaging station funding (\$272K), and water measurement cost share funds (\$66K) to assure data can be collected and used.
- OWRD must be able to investigate groundwater conditions. Groundwater is becoming a scarce resource and needs to be more closely managed in the future. The groundwater investigations funding (\$796K) should be reinstated to assure we can identify and protect our supply.

- OWRD must be able to facilitate efforts to bring partners together to develop better water management approaches and provide assistance with planning for key projects. We recommend adding back complex facilitation funding (\$1M), and feasibility study grants (\$200K).

Providing OWRD with sufficient funding to meet the public expectations is dependent on the budget actions discussed above, and it is also dependent on a number of important legislative bills to fill the gaps. There are several bills related to fee increases for OWRD programs. If these bills fail, it will be necessary to augment the OWRD budget so that OWRD can continue to provide the services that are expected. Additionally, the Water Caucus has spent considerable effort to develop and promote a variety of bills that will help further advance abilities to effectively manage our water resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input.



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