



Date: February 20, 2025
To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
From: Deschutes River Conservancy
Re: SB 5543 (OWRD 2025-2027 Budget)

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Deschutes River Conservancy Supports HB 5543 and additional investments in foundational water management data and capacity to enable a sustainable water future.

The Deschutes River Conservancy (DRC) restores streamflow and improves water quality in the Deschutes Basin using a collaborative and voluntary approach. DRC's Board includes tribal, environmental, and irrigated agricultural interests, as well as federal, state and local government. As such, we are familiar with how critical OWRD capacity is to manage water to meet needs for rivers, agriculture, and communities.

Multiple studies and assessments have documented that Oregon needs to vastly improve the way it manages water to meet the state's needs into the future. The Oregon Water Resources Department is at the core of this work and it needs to be sufficiently funded to do its job. The state of Oregon must continue to grow the data, science and management capacity necessary for a sustainable water future. Whether farmer, city, or fish---the Department's work is critical in meeting both instream and out-of-stream needs across the state and into the future. Towards these goals, we urge the following:

- **Maintain OWRD's Current Service Levels**– We need to maintain OWRD's current service levels. With a long legacy of over-appropriation of our streams, climate change and increasing competition for scarce water resources, OWRD needs adequate staff for on-the-ground management, data collection and analysis, water allocation/re-allocation, technical assistance, planning and the many other statutory duties the agency has.

While the DRC supports the GRB in full, we would like to emphasize two areas of importance for the DRC:

1. **Package 104 – Feasibility Studies, Water Projects, & Wells (\$22.2m).**
The DRC and its partners utilize the Feasibility Studies and Water Supply Grants and Loans programs heavily to fund on-the-ground multi-benefit work. With the uncertainty around federal funding, this funding source for proven on the ground solutions is even more important.

2. Package 106 – American Rescue Plan Act Carryover (\$3.35M)

This package includes \$350k to support place-based planning. The Deschutes Basin Water Collaborative is using the place-based planning framework now to complete an integrated water management plan and relies on this funding to support coordination.

- **Reject Package 090 Reductions related to data and services (\$2,521,000 GF):** Water data is the foundation of responsible water management. The 2025 GRB proposes to cut critical funding for data fundamentals including \$114k in evapotranspiration funding, \$100k in agrimet funding, \$769k in groundwater investigation funding, \$272k in gaging station funding, \$1m in complex facilitation funding and \$66k in water measurement cost share funds. Groups like the DRC are working with diverse partners to innovate and implement multi-benefit water management strategies- data like evapotranspiration and agrimet data are necessary to make these strategies work. As basins respond to the state’s new groundwater allocation rules, funding for groundwater investigations is critical. Gaging stations provide the foundation for water management and need to be supported. The state’s investment in complex facilitation in the Deschutes has been a game-changer and should be supported statewide. Water measurement cost share provides positive incentives for better measurement. Please reject the proposed cuts to these funds.

- **Add funding for groundwater studies removed in the 2023-2025 budget development process (\$447,830 GF):** Sustainable groundwater management is critical to Oregon’s water future. In addition to restoring Package 090 Reductions to groundwater studies we urge the committee to add back cuts applied in the 2023-2025 budget process meant to fund cooperative groundwater basin studies and groundwater data. Right now in the Deschutes we are recognizing the need for additional groundwater information to guide our collaborative strategies- and we know that major gaps in groundwater data exist statewide. Data is the foundation of staying ahead of problems that are harder to solve on the back end.

The mission of the Oregon Water Resources Department reads as follows:

Serve the public by practicing & promoting responsible water management.

- Restore & protect streamflow to ensure the sustainability of Oregon’s ecosystem, economy, and quality of life.
- Directly address Oregon’s water supply needs.

The Department cannot fulfill this mission without adequate resources. A fully functioning Oregon Water Resources Department able to manage our scarce water resources needs to be a priority for the state. We urge you to resist cuts to services, data and programs, and instead build up agency capacity so it can better serve Oregon.

Sincerely,

Kate Fitzpatrick

Kate Fitzpatrick
Executive Director