



February 25, 2025

Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

**RE: H.B. 5039 and H.B. 5040, Support for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) 2025-2027 Budget**

Dear Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) 2025-2027 budget. OWEB is Oregon's primary agency supporting voluntary conservation on private land. The agency has an effective and long-term track record of restoring watershed health, building healthy habitats and providing long-term protection for native fish and wildlife. Over the past two bienniums, OWEB has responded to requests from partners, the legislature, and the Governor's Office to take on new responsibilities and programs due to their reputation as an effective and responsive grant administrator.

East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD) serves the community of East Multnomah County from the Willamette River to Hood River County. Our mission is to help people care for land and water. We do this by providing conservation services to the urban and rural communities in our district. EMSWCD is a direct recipient of OWEB capacity funding that helps us work with private landowners to implement soil health practices and protect water quality. We are deeply invested in the health of the watersheds in our district and join OWEB in supporting the Columbia Slough Watershed Council and Johnson Creek Watershed Council. Through our Strategic Partnership grant agreements, we leverage OWEB's support to ensure these Councils continue their important work to restore watershed health and connect people to nature.

**Support for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program:**

Our District joins OWEB in responding to the rapid loss of farmland in Oregon. Through EMSWCD's land conservation program, we partner with voluntary farmers to create "Forever Farms" that ensure farmland remains available for current and future generations of farmers. The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Programs (OAHP) provides a similar framework by utilizing conservation easements to prevent the conversion and fragmentation of working farm and ranch lands. OAHP provides a critical match to Federal and local investments like our program, that are geared to support farmers and provide conservation outcomes.

Investments in farmland protection enjoy broad bipartisan support because they help ensure agriculture remains a strong part of Oregon's future. As we've seen in our program, working farmland easements unlock equity that farmers can invest in their operations, assist with transfer to the next generation of farmers and can help steward important natural resources.



**When considering OWEB's 2025-2027 Budget, the East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District is asking that this Committee provide OWEB with the \$17.3M needed for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program. This funding request is currently before the Ways and Means committee in H.B. 3131 that passed unanimously out of the House Agriculture Committee in February.**

Sincerely,

Kelley Beamer  
Executive Director, East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District