

Co-Chairs Frederick and Emerson-Levy and members of the committee. My name is Daniel Whelan and I am the Director of Government Affairs for Sustainable Northwest.

Sustainable Northwest strongly supports HB 5039 to support funding for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board.

Sustainable Northwest was a strong supporter of the creation of the OWEB Drinking Water Source Protection Program in the 2023 Biennium and continues to support it through HB 3341, which would appropriate an additional \$5 million for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program for the current 2025–2027 biennium.

Sustainable Northwest has worked collaboratively with OWEB staff, watershed councils, community partners and others to encourage participation in this important program that protects critical watersheds to clean drinking water access for small communities.

But it is the OWEB staff that is most critical to the success of this program and other programs that protect watersheds.

In the last biennium, OWEB received one Natural Resources Specialist 4 - Drinking Water Source Protection Specialist to coordinate the newly established Drinking Water Source Protection Program. With that staff, OWEB was able to rapidly convene an advisory committee, develop and adopt rules, and launch the grant offering.

In April, when OWEB makes the first round of funding awards for this program at its board meeting, five communities in Oregon will be able to begin to make a transformational investment in long term drinking water protection. Soon after, the bond sale for this program will provide much of the grant funding to kick this off.

Interest in the Drinking Water Source Protection program has only grown since it was established, and the program will continue to grow more as communities across the state see the positive impacts for participating water providers in Baker, Wasco, Clackamas, Clatsop, Douglas, Tillamook, and Curry counties.

A survey of public water providers estimated another \$29 million will be needed to meet demand for this program from other Oregon communities. OWEB will need to continue to provide the professional and customer-service oriented staff necessary to evaluate, award, and implement source protection projects that will be funded this spring and managed for the next few years. Should the legislature provide additional funding for this program for another biennium, continuity of that staff to continue this work will also be incredibly important.

The General Funds included in the Governor's Budget for Drinking Water Source Protection Program for staffing continuity will allow OWEB to continue to successfully manage grants for projects awarded under this new program during the 2025-2027 biennium. In addition, this funding will also provide supplies and services funding to support legal and due-diligence costs.

In closing, Sustainable Northwest strongly supports the staff continuity necessary to continue to make the Drinking Water Source Program a successful investment.