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March 13, 2025

House Committee On Climate, Energy, and Environment  
Oregon State Legislature

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2981

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Dear Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Gamba, Vice-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is providing testimony in support of HB 2981-2, which will help fund and support critical aquatic invasive species prevention efforts. Increasing funding for state agency response efforts is crucial to detecting and preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species, particularly Quagga and zebra freshwater mussels.

OWRC is a nonprofit trade association representing irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts, water improvement districts, and other local government entities delivering agricultural water supplies throughout Oregon. These water stewards operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower facilities. OWRC members deliver water to approximately 600,000 acres of farmland in Oregon, which is over one-third of all the irrigated land in the state. Some of our members operate reservoirs with boat access that are susceptible to aquatic invasive species, and virtually all depend on water supplies and infrastructure that is vulnerable if Oregon is invaded by voracious species of mussels.

Aquatic invasive species are a threat to Oregon lakes, rivers, streams, and other waterbodies, including reservoirs and other constructed water infrastructure. Under ORS 830.587, this includes aquatic species of wildlife, freshwater or marine invertebrate, and aquatic noxious weeds identified as a prohibited species by rule. "Quagga and zebra mussels...are among the top species of concern, due to their destructive nature and ease of translocation by watercraft."<sup>1</sup> These freshwater mussels can attach to hard surfaces, such as boats and water pipes, can survive outside of water for several days, and reproduce rapidly. Infestations lead to severe economic and environmental damage as infrastructure becomes encrusted, water pipes clogged, beaches/shores made unwalkable from the sharp shells, and native species imperiled by lack of food or changes in water quality.

In response to the threat of these invasive species, the Oregon Legislature created Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program in 2009 (HB 2220). This program is designed to prevent the introduction of new aquatic invasive species and limit the spread of existing species in waterways around Oregon. The program is funded by a Waterway Access or Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) permit purchased by boaters using specified watercraft.

The threat of aquatic invasive species, specifically invasive mussels, has recently increased since Quagga mussels were found in the Snake River in Idaho in 2023 and 2024. As a response to this and other mussel discoveries, a Bi-State Work Group between Oregon and Washington was convened in the fall of 2024 to discuss near-term strategies and partnerships to prevent these destructive species from entering Oregon and Washington waterways.

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<sup>1</sup> *Oregon's Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Program 2022 Legislative Report*, submitted February 2023.  
<https://www.oregon.gov/osmb/boater-info/Documents/AIS/AISPP2022AnnualReport.pdf>

The -2 amendments to HB 2981 would help fund several near-term recommendations from the recently released report<sup>2</sup>, including:

- **Goal 1 Enhance prevention efforts:** “expand early detection monitoring efforts to identify new infestations of invasive mussels as early as possible for the purpose of initiating response actions; “...update and expand waterbody risk assessments.” Increase additional mandatory boat inspection “check stations at strategic locations and expand coverage at existing stations;” “increase inspection of other aquatic conveyances such as sea planes, construction equipment, and barges.”
- **Goal 3 Ensure rapid response preparedness:** “clarify and document roles, responsibilities and decision-making authorities with all jurisdictions having legal authority, including tribal nations, state and federal agencies, and local governments including ports;” “The states of Oregon and Washington should work with State Legislatures and Governor’s Offices to develop a mutually agreeable process for declaring emergencies in shared waters of Washington and Oregon, that include decision support tools with criteria that need to be met for an invasive species emergency to be declared;” and “establish state Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) Groups with organizations having legal jurisdiction, response resources, or scientific expertise for the purpose of ensuring successful rapid response, in addition to the ongoing advising of prevention and readiness actions prior to an emergency.”

If these aquatic invaders take hold in a reservoir or other waterway, they will quickly reproduce, clog infrastructure, and impacted irrigation districts would be unable to deliver water to the farms and ranchers they serve, leading to additional negative impacts to agriculture, the economy, and local communities. The potential for severe and catastrophic damage on water infrastructure from invasive mussels outweighs concerns about the additional cost and responsibility associated with operating boat inspection stations. Some areas are more susceptible than others, with factors such as temperature and habitat suitability for invasive species to survive, but also the remoteness of reservoirs with recreational access, number of out-of-state visitors, and distance to existing boat inspection stations. Without additional boat inspection stations and increased public awareness about the threat that invasive species poses, Oregon is at high risk for devastating economic and environmental damage.

HB 2981-2 would complement the existing AIS program and provide critically needed funding to increase prevention efforts and ensure Oregon’s state agencies are ready to respond if an aquatic invasive species is detected in our waterways. We urge you to pass HB 2981-2 and help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species in Oregon. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,  
April Snell  
Executive Director

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<sup>2</sup> Oregon and Washington Invasive Mussel Near-Term Action Working Group: Findings and Near-Term Action Recommendations Report, released January 14, 2025. <https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/oregon-washington-invasive-mussel-findings-and-near-term-action-recommendations.pdf>