



March 17, 2025

Oregon Natural Resource Subcommittee of Ways and Means  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court St. NE Salem, OR 97301

Re: SB 5539 (Support)

Co-Chairs Senator Frederick and Representative Levy,

On behalf of the Oregon Chapters of the Surfrider Foundation, we write to express our strong support for the Department of State Lands' (DSL) 2025-27 budget proposal. As a coastal conservation group of recreational users and stakeholders, we believe key investments in DSL are critical for protecting Oregon's wetlands, waterways, estuaries, and submerged lands of Oregon's Territorial Sea. With a number of growing uses and development pressures on critically important submerged land habitats, now in particular is a critical time to invest in DSL to be a strong steward and responsible landlord for these areas. We urge the Subcommittee to fully fund DSL's proposed budget, particularly key policy option packages and legislative initiatives that address pressing challenges in Oregon's coastal and aquatic environments. Key areas of opportunity and needs for investment include:

### **Enforcement and Compliance in Managing Oregon's Submerged Lands**

DSL plays a vital role in managing submerged lands, including the territorial sea and submerged lands of our ocean waters. However, persistent enforcement and compliance issues related to waterway leases, permitting, and regulatory oversight—particularly concerning marine debris, derelict vessels and deteriorating infrastructure—threaten the health of Oregon's aquatic ecosystems and local economies downstream. Strengthening DSL's capacity will ensure better oversight of these resources, protecting the public interest and ecological integrity of Oregon's waters. In particular as Oregon seeks growing and new uses of submerged waters – offshore wind, port economic development, dredging, aquaculture leases and undersea cables – and, as critical habitats and species from kelp to seagrasses decline, Oregon demands a well-equipped agency for management.

### **Key Budget Priorities and Policy Option Packages**

**POP 202 - Abandoned and Derelict Vessels Program:** This package is essential for implementing the Abandoned and Derelict Vessels program, which mitigates the dangers posed by derelict vessels that discharge hazardous materials and create navigation hazards. This funding is critical for public safety and maintaining clean and healthy waterways.

**POP 201 - Wetlands and Aquatic Resource Management:** Providing essential staff and programmatic capacity is necessary for DSL to manage wetlands and aquatic resources

effectively. Oregon's wetlands serve as crucial habitats and natural flood mitigation systems, and their protection requires dedicated resources and personnel.

**POP 203 & 206 - South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve (SSNERR):**

Supporting these packages ensures the continued operation and protection of this critical reserve. SSNERR provides essential outdoor education and estuarine research opportunities. Given potential federal funding cuts to the National Estuarine Research Reserve program, robust state funding is more crucial than ever.

**Legislative Priorities to Strengthen Oregon's Coastal Management**

**HB 3580 - Eelgrass Action Bill:** As an Oregon Ocean Alliance priority, this bill allocates \$140,000 to fund a 0.5 FTE Natural Resource Specialist 4 (NRS4) position at DSL to support the Eelgrass Task Force. Submerged aquatic vegetation, including eelgrass and kelp, plays a vital role in carbon sequestration, shoreline stabilization, and marine biodiversity. State investment in their protection is imperative.

**HB 3587 - Rocky Habitat Stewardship Bill:** This bill dedicates \$300,000 to a small grant fund administered by the Oregon Ocean Science Trust to support coastal communities in stewarding protected rocky habitat sites. With no overhead costs to DSL, this initiative will enhance local conservation efforts and ensure the protection of Oregon's rocky shore ecosystems.

The Oregon Chapters' of the Surfrider Foundation urge the Subcommittee to fully fund these essential programs and initiatives within DSL's 2025-27 budget. DSL's work in protecting and managing submerged lands, marine habitats, and estuarine resources is vital for the ecological and economic well-being of our state. Strengthening enforcement, regulatory oversight, and research and monitoring investments will help ensure that Oregon's coastal and aquatic ecosystems remain resilient and thriving for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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