



**OREGON**  
ASSOCIATION OF  
NURSERIES

**Testimony before the House Energy, Environment and Water Committee  
House Bill 4101**

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Co-Chairs Bailey and Gilliam, members of the Committee, I am Steve Shropshire, Legal Counsel for the Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN). I appreciate this opportunity to voice the nursery and greenhouse industry's comments on House Bill 4101, which helps set the State's water policy agenda for the future.

**Oregon nursery industry background**

The nursery and greenhouse industry remains the state's largest agricultural sector despite a severe economic downturn. Oregon's nursery growers ship their products throughout the country, over 74% of nursery stock grown in our state – with over half reaching markets east of the Mississippi River. Nursery association members represent wholesale and Christmas tree growers, retailers and greenhouse operations.

Our members have spent generations as stewards of the state's natural resources. We believe that economic vitality can go hand in hand with sustainability and long-term environmental health. The development of a state water policy preference for the enhancement of statewide water supplies is consistent with those beliefs and something that we support.

**It is time for the state to begin enhancing its water supply options**

Although few people in Oregon realize it, our state is in the midst of a water crisis. Every year, the holders of water rights for both consumptive uses and instream uses are told there is not enough water in our streams or our aquifers to satisfy their rights. In addition, many others are routinely told that there is no water available for new appropriations. The recently released draft of the Water Resources Department's Integrated Water Resources Strategy discusses the strong possibility that climate change will cause more of our precipitation to fall as winter rain instead of snow. That means the gradual release of snowmelt throughout the spring and summer months will be significantly impacted. As a result, our surface streams will run low much earlier in the year—imperiling both instream and consumptive uses.

If our state does not prioritize the development and enhancement of additional water supplies now, at the early stages of this crisis, we will find that we have waited too long. When we talk about water supply enhancement, we are talking primarily about storing water when it is available for use later in the year when it is not. Of course, water conservation is a key component of any future supply scenario, but that only scratches the surface of what the state will need to develop to sustain its future instream and consumptive demands.

In 2006, the State of Washington passed a Columbia River water supply development bill, together with a companion measure that approved the issuance of \$200 million in general obligation bonds to help finance water supply enhancement in the Columbia River Basin. In the last year, the Washington Department of Ecology has begun issuing new uninterruptible water rights in that basin for the first time many years. That program carries benefits for both instream and consumptive uses and passes muster with the federal agencies responsible for the protection of federally listed threatened and endangered species. Why is it that Oregon continues to sit on the sidelines watching our neighbors put their natural resources to use in an economically and ecologically sound manner?

The Columbia Basin includes a portion the Canadian province of British Columbia, most of the U.S. states of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington – all told almost 260,000 square miles. The Columbia River is by no means an intermittent stream. By volume, the Columbia is the fourth-largest river in the U.S., and it has the greatest flow of any North American river draining into the Pacific. Other states have invested time, dollars and effort to make this resource work for multiple needs and uses. Oregon is falling behind and must take some real steps to address water policy to secure our economic competitiveness.

### **We are losing the opportunity for economic development**

For 2010, the Oregon Department of Agriculture estimated that the value of agricultural exports was \$1.37 billion. That traded sector component of agricultural production brings fresh dollars into our state that would not otherwise be here—driving economic development that does not come from simply passing a dollar from hand to hand inside Oregon.

However, that tremendous value to our state's economy is largely dependent on the availability of irrigation water. The Oregon nursery industry, like many other agricultural sectors, is water dependent. According to the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service 2008 Census of Agriculture, approximately one-quarter of Oregon's farm land is irrigated--1.75 million acres out of a total 6.95 million total acres in production. But of this total, the irrigated ground accounted for 85% of the value of all Oregon non-grain food crops. Without access to water for agricultural production, this significant component of Oregon's economy cannot be sustained, much less grow.

In addition, as stewards of the state's land and water resources, our rural landowners have a commitment to healthy ecosystems. The vast majority of these folks are multi-generational farmers, having grown up swimming and fishing in the streams and rivers that run through their properties. They drink water from the aquifers. They depend on a clean, reliable source of water for their crops. They value the environment in which they live and work every day.

They also appreciate the need for healthy fisheries and the economic value that those fisheries bring to our state. They just believe that with careful management and creativity, it is possible to have a healthy, robust agricultural economy and a healthy, robust fishery in the same watershed. That is why the OAN supports a water supply enhancement strategy that offers benefits for both instream and consumptive demands.

### **We must prioritize**

In 2009, this body tasked the Water Resources Department with the creation of a statewide integrated water resources strategy. Over the last two years department staff, members of the Water Resources Commission, and many dedicated members of the public have been hard at work preparing a draft of that strategy. That draft document contains numerous discussions about the need to adapt to ever-increasing demands on our water resources, the economic value derived from an ample supply of water, the impact that climate change may have on future supply, and in small part, the need to consider how we develop and fund the enhancement of our existing water supplies.

### **Conclusion**

We believe the state needs to step forward with a bold strategy to protect our future economic and ecological interests. We believe it is time for the state to prioritize the enhancement of water supplies, both in the Columbia Basin but also in the other watersheds along our coast and in the southern part of the state. We believe we have to start somewhere, and that HB 4101 is a good step in the right direction.

We look forward to working with this committee, other stakeholders, the Governor's office, and the Water Resources Department to press boldly forward to address this urgent need.

Thank you for your time and attention.