



**Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon  
Before the Joint Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee  
SB 5547 -- Water Resources Department Budget  
March 28, 2013**

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. WaterWatch works to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's waterways. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has hundreds of members across Oregon who care deeply about our waterways, fish and wildlife and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

**WaterWatch urges the Joint Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee to fund the Water Resources Department (WRD) to the fullest extent possible.**

Basic management of Oregon's water resources is one of the states most critical environmental and economic challenges. Eighteen out of nineteen of Oregon's major river basins are already over appropriated from the late spring to the early fall. At the same time, population growth and climate change are increasing the pressure on Oregon's waterways and aquifers.

While we understand the gravity of the state's budget crisis, we urge the Ways and Means subcommittee to retain the WRD's base budget to the maximum extent possible. The WRD is already understaffed for the essential jobs it must perform. The WRD continues to operate with reduced capacity in key areas and under the damaging effects of multiple staff cuts during the 1990s and earlier in this decade.

Oregon has already granted over 85,000 water rights for the use of the public's water. Most rivers and streams are already over appropriated during most of the year. Users are turning to groundwater, but Oregon lacks scientific knowledge in many areas of the state sufficient to understand the effects of new groundwater use on existing surface water resources. Accordingly, the WRDs top priorities should be focused on water management, developing the scientific information necessary to inform sound surface and groundwater management, and water allocation and reallocation decisions.

To that end, we not only urge the subcommittee to support the Governor's Balanced Budget, but we also urge the subcommittee to consider the addition to two packages that were not included in this budget.

- Package 105: Groundwater data collection and integration
- Package 106: Surface water data collection and integration.

These two packages fund the basic information gathering that serves as the underpinning of much of the Water Resources Departments work to responsibly manage Oregon's water resources. The information gathered under these packages is used for making critical decisions in water management, protecting and monitoring instream flows and groundwater levels, and other key department functions.

**Conclusion:** WaterWatch recognizes the severity of the current budget situation. However, we also recognize the value and importance of a fully functioning Water Resources Department. Assuming some cuts may be required, we respectfully request that the subcommittee prioritize retaining key water management, science, field service, regulatory and streamflow restoration positions over the more traditional transactional functions when analyzing any proposed cuts. These identified functions are key to proper management of what is arguably the state's most valuable resource – water.

WaterWatch recognizes the importance of the more traditional transactional functions of the WRD, such as water right permitting, consumptive use transfers, extensions and certificate work. However, unlike the management and scientific work, the state has options to generate fees to pay for these transactional positions, including increased reliance on reimbursement authority or increased fees to support the necessary positions. On that subject, we strongly urge the passage of HB 2259 as a critical component of adequately funding this agency.

WaterWatch thanks the subcommittee for this opportunity to provide our perspective on this very important agency budget.