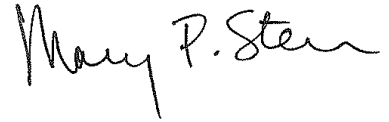


Date: March 28, 2013

To: Members of the Natural Resources Subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Ways & Means.

From: Commissioner Mary Stern, Yamhill County
President, Association of Oregon Counties



Subject: House Bill 5547; Water Resources Department budget.

The 36 counties that make up the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) have different landscapes, population sizes, economic bases, policy interests, and outlooks on life. Nevertheless, all counties agree that there may not be anything more critical to quality of life in Oregon than securing the future of the State's water resources.

We need sufficient clean water to support a strong economy, healthy ecosystems, and thriving communities. Since water resources are finite, land use planning decisions must be informed by reliable information on water availability. We need adequate management tools that are supported by good, verifiable science, factual data, and clear policy decisions informed by all views around the State. Water management will only become more difficult as our population and needs grow. That is why AOC has supported development and implementation of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS), the blueprint to address state and local needs. Counties have pitched in as advisory group members, facilitators, event conveners, and commenters. But the IWRS must also have sufficient state resources to work.

Therefore, it is more important than ever to have a fully functioning Water Resources Department (WRD). The Governor's proposed budget for the agency is a good start, and AOC supports it. We would prefer a budget that not just keeps a stressed WRD whole, but returns its operations to a fully functioning capacity.

Counties know full well the fiscal stresses on public services. We have ample experience grappling with revenue shortfalls. In our view, WRD and its critical functions have been cut too much. Now is the time to rebuild WRD so that it can contribute more fully to Oregon's economic recovery.