



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON

March 28, 2013

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Senator Chris Edwards and Representative Ben Unger, Co-Chairs
Members of the Committee

Re: SB 5547 – Water Resources Department Budget: SUPPORT

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has strong positions on both water quality and quantity. We published two reports on water issues, one in 2009 and another in 2010. We were privileged to have had a seat on the Integrated Water Resources Strategy Policy Advisory Group. And members often attend Water Resources Commission meetings and work group meetings on a variety of issues. As a result of that engagement, we provide testimony today in support of the Water Resources Department's proposed budget.

A reminder:

“All water within the State from all sources of water belongs to the public.”

With that in mind, we support General Funding for the base budget/activities of the department.

Our next priority is funding for data collection and analysis so that transaction requests can be fairly processed and any requests for storage can be processed in a manner to assure the public's rights are protected. We include the entire ecosystem in that expected protection. In priority order, we support:

POP 202: Groundwater Investigations: This data is critical to processing groundwater requests. It is also important so that counties can fairly process land use applications where groundwater is required.

POP 102: Instream Protections: 2 FTE Hydrologists to work in conjunction with ODFW.

POP 101: Water-Use Reporting Program: Measuring and reporting the amount of surface water and groundwater diverted for beneficial use helps the state understand & characterize Oregon's water resources.

POP 103: Measurement Cost Share Fund: Having some money available as a carrot to obtain new measurement devices in areas of importance will again provide data needed for future decision making.

POP 203: Additional Field Services: Field staff are necessary to manage Oregon's waters fairly and according to law.

We support POP 108 (SB 217) because we believe the 85,000 water rights in Oregon need better management and the revenue from this fee will provide additional scientific and field staff needed for future projects. We believe ALL Oregonians should share in this cost, so we believe municipal users should pay their fair share.

There is a link between this scientific work and the need for future water storage in Oregon. The League believes that our weather is changing and that our wonderful natural storage—our beautiful Cascade Mountains—will not provide the summer water we will need in the future. BUT storage projects need to be vetted. Where to get the water—even winter water—must be a science-based decision. We have not mentioned the proposed storage POPs in this letter because we cannot support them without the entire package with the exception of POP 205, the Umatilla Loan Fund. We have supported this project because the scientific work has been done, we have invested General Funds in this project in past years and we believe the local community has come together with a governance structure and a plan to pay for the loan.

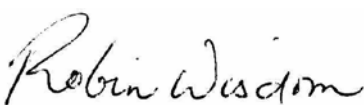
We believe that POP 207 (HB 2257) and POP (HB 2259) are important to both the management of our water rights and assuring timely processing of transactions, critical to our economy. We also believe that the 50/50 split between applicants and the General Fund is an appropriate division. There is an assumption that applicants will receive a financial gain from the use of Oregon's waters (or why would they apply?) AND the general public needs to be assured that these transactions are processed with the public's interest in mind as well.

The League commends the department for its incredible work on the Integrated Water Resources Strategy. We were most pleased by the outreach efforts and the website that allowed all Oregonians to participate, comment and shape the final document.

We laud the work of the Water Resources Commission as they struggled to address the funding needs of the department. They considered a wide range of proposals and tried to address fairness, equity AND recommend a proposal that would provide enough money to fund the important work of the department.

We ask that you consider our testimony and provide adequate funding for the Water Resources Department for the good of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom
President



Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator