



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

April 23, 2009

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Senator Vicki Walker and Representative Bob Jenson, Co-Chairs

Re: Natural Resource Agencies: Budgets on Water Issues
Water Resources Department
Department of Environmental Quality
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
Department of State Lands
Department of Human Services, Public Health Division (drinking water)
Department of Agriculture
Department of Forestry
Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
Department of Land Conservation and Development-both statewide land use
program and coastal management

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. In recent testimony, the League expressed our concerns about budget cuts related to agencies that deal with water issues. At that time, you asked that we review our newly published water study (<http://www.lwvor.org/recentstudies.htm#Water>) and provide a list of those agencies. We understand that you are searching for ways to consolidate or reduce the funding allotted to these agencies.

We are providing you with general comments and thoughts, but believe that **any restructuring of agency duties is a long-term project and will need thoughtful consideration. We believe you are looking for efficiencies and duplication of effort. Please keep in mind that each agency's mission differs and is critical to the health and welfare of Oregonians.** With that in mind:

- 1) Where possible, water issues should be considered either by watershed or basin rather than governmental lines.
- 2) Although each agency is responsible for administering Oregon and often federal law governing water, perhaps a co-sharing of office space, public involvement or educational efforts might be useful. Such consolidation might also allow for sharing of clerical or administrative support staff. It might also help with a consolidation of water data. This proposal assumes such space would be

available and at a lesser price than current leases and that cross-training of staff would actually **save** money.

Note: In discussing this issue with long time League members, we have found that consolidation of field offices and enforcement staff is not a new issue. In the 1980s and again in the 1990s such conversations occurred. Consolidation becomes difficult as staff skills and law requirements differ. Other than some office sharing, no one has found the “right” answer for this challenging issue.

- 3) Where federal agencies are involved, consider where to locate local offices. Since local governments may also be partners, if they can share office space or resource space with those partners (and this happens in some cases), such cooperation might also best serve the general public. If not a sharing of offices, then some multi-agency sharing of information systems, data bases and programs would be valuable.
- 4) Are there “best practices” efforts that could be consolidated? They exist for industry, forestry and agriculture.
- 5) Each agency has its own data base. We realize each has its own purpose, but some connection among them should be considered.
- 6) We know that an effort was made to “streamline” state agency permitting processes in 2005. We have not tracked that effort, but understand that the challenge was more difficult than it might have seemed. Of concern to the League is always that the public know how to participate in permit applications where the law allows.
- 7) The public continues to be frustrated by the lack of clear connection between land use planning and water quantity and quality. Although this is a policy issue, rural residential development increases the costs not only to state agencies but to local governments. Both physical (water, sewer, roads) and social (police, fire, school busses) infrastructure is more costly when spread across counties than when concentrated in our 242 cities and towns.
- 8) A-Engrossed Senate Bill 193 provides an opportunity to have this broader statewide discussion and help us create a statewide water strategy for the future. We know that money is short; however, we cannot afford to wait for this effort to begin.

We recognize that small agencies can be efficient because they **have to be**. Larger agencies can be efficient because they can use **economies of scale**.

We believe that fees for service are appropriate in some cases; however, such fees cannot abrogate the job of the agency to protect the rights of the general public and to administer rules and laws.

Thank you for allowing us to comment on this important issue. The League study of water law did **not** include a study of potential consolidation of agencies. We are continuing our study of water, learning how current rules and laws are applied around the state. Part 2 should be available in 2010.

The League does not want to see precipitous cuts to water agency budgets that assume savings due to some yet unknown consolidation. Please let us know how we might continue to help with this very important issue.



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LWVOR President



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Natural Resources Coordinator

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