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Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources

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Dear Committee Members

I am a rancher and environmental consultant in eastern Oregon. We have observed over the last few years the atrophy of Oregon's Department of Geology. As you well know, in 2009 several offices around the state were closed. Departmental staff have been reduced and not replaced. The functionality of the services that the geologists provide for agriculture is vital for Oregon Agriculture; specifically irrigation water.

Across the majority of the landscape in Oregon, subsurface geology is unknown. A coordinated effort to map subsurface soil layers, soil types, water bearing regions, aquifers and their extents has never been undertaken. This is critical for Oregon agriculture in order to plan for and develop irrigation wells. In Oregon Water Resources Department's (OWRD) well application/groundwater review process, OAR 690-009-0040 states that determination must be based on best available information including but not limited to hydrogeologic reports. In many areas across the state these are not available.

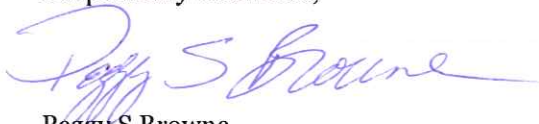
The relatively recent effort of OWRD through their long-term planning effort, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, illustrated through public input that people are very concerned about the future of water in the State. Thus the nexus between Department of Geology and the Department of Water Resources. Agriculture producers in parts of the State that have not had subsurface mapping conducted need the Departments to work together to do so in order to quantify and qualify subsurface water availability. OWRD has changed significantly throughout the last two years how groundwater application rules have been interpreted and how the ground water review takes place. This is due predominantly to having to guess about subsurface geology. It is in no one's best interest to be declared a critical ground water area. However, if an area is ground water limited, as good stewards, we need to know before groundwater has been diminished to critical levels.

Many producers in eastern Oregon support and value the expertise provided by the DOGAMI and respectfully request continued funding for the Department.

It has also come to our attention that there has been a task force (or steering group) assembled to address the budget issue faced by the Department. Apparently, the committee has already been named and no representatives from agriculture or staff members are included. There has obviously been a lack of communication which often leads to the perception of lack of transparency. We hope that it is early enough in the long-term planning effort to rectify the situation and respectfully request that the Governor's office and other leaders ensure representation from agriculture and staff.

In closing, we value the services that the Department has provided to land managers across the state. With the technical information that they provide we can do a better job to manage a sustainable water supply and food production for our State.

Respectfully submitted,



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