



HB 5002

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon Submitted to Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

February 25, 2015

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

WaterWatch of Oregon urges the Joint Subcommittee to reject the funding request for Package 450 of HB 5002

The Governor's Recommended Budget for the Oregon Department of Agriculture added Package 450. As described in the Governor's Recommended Budget, Package 450 adds an Alignment Team Coordinator to lead a multi-agency Alignment and Coordination Team to align the work of Oregon's natural resource agencies to ensure integration with Regional Solutions (General Fund \$325,000)

Of concern is the fact that Package 450 would support work to "align the work of Oregon's natural resources agencies to ensure integration with Regional Solutions".

The Regional Solutions program's reach over natural resource agency decision making and priority setting is of growing concern to many in the conservation community. Regional priorities are set by Regional Advisory Committees (RACs), which are made up largely of business and elected officials. Despite the fact that many regional priorities involve Oregon's waters, lands, forests and species, conservation interests do not have a seat on the RACs. Making this exclusion even more troublesome is that, despite assurances in the 2014 legislative session that the program would offer a robust public notice and comment process, the Regional Solutions program only provides a seven day public notice/comment period on RAC decisions that could have profound impacts on Oregon's natural resources.

Under the existing Regional Solutions program as set out in HB 4015(2014), natural resource agencies must already provide staff to regional "teams" when RAC demands, and all natural resource agencies must work to "fulfill" the regional priorities that this group of economic and business interests sets, regardless of agency mission. Under the existing program, private interests are already having undue influence over state natural resource agency autonomy,

workload and priorities. The establishment of “regional alignment teams” and “regional alignment coordinators” will add to an already existing problem. Basically, it will allow Regional Solutions to dictate how state agencies make their regulatory decisions and mandate that they work to advance high priority projects advanced by a narrow group of economic interests that may not necessarily be consistent with statewide environmental goals or the best interests of all the citizens of Oregon.

Conclusion: While WaterWatch is supportive of agency coordination where it can be done in a manner that protects the integrity of individual agency missions, policies and goals, we do not believe that it is in the best interests of the public at large to create a program and/or a position to “align the work of Oregon’s natural resource agencies to ensure integration with Regional Solutions”. Thus, we respectfully urge the Committee to decline to fund Package 450.

Contacts:

Kimberley Priestley, Sr. Policy Analyst, 503-295-4039 x 3, kjp@waterwatch.org

Jonathan Manton, 541-729-2923, jonathan@sawneeservices.com