



March 9, 2015

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature

Broad Support for SB 5540 & 5541

Soil and water conservation districts, watershed councils, and land trusts all work with willing landowners to accomplish voluntary restoration across Oregon. OWEB programs provide support that enable these groups to work collaboratively, forging relationships that leverage local knowledge and resources. This grass roots approach builds relationships and trust needed for local partnerships that address critical regional and statewide restoration needs.

The complementary work of councils, districts, and land trusts helps achieve positive ecological, economic, and social impacts statewide. These benefits are derived from strategic partnerships with federal agencies, other conservation organizations, and private foundations that leverage OWEB funds for broad-reaching impacts. Between 2013 and 2014, OWEB grants were matched with over \$52M in additional funding.

To date, OWEB has invested over \$500M in restoration projects statewide, and much of that has helped to support a restoration economy in many rural communities. Land trusts and their partners have leveraged approximately \$40M of that investment to protect nearly 60,000 acres throughout Oregon. Councils and districts implement almost 70% of the projects OWEB funds. Working together between 2012 and 2013, districts and councils leveraged OWEB funds to treat 436 miles of streamside habitat, improve 216 individual stream crossings, and re-open 237 stream miles to fish passage.

Over the last biennium, OWEB has directed a robust process around updating its grant programs to make more strategic investments and ensure the long-term viability of those investments. Change and transition is never easy, but this process has helped to hasten a trend toward greater collaboration and more strategic partnerships around important regional and statewide restoration and conservation needs. As state and federal programs come into better alignment over the next biennium, we expect OWEB programs will be well-positioned to provide the vital capacity support and match funding needed to help councils, districts, and land trusts build projects with broad reach and measurable ecological impacts.

Land trusts, watershed councils, and conservation districts work to implement the goals of Measure 76 and thus are critical partners in furthering OWEB's mission to help protect and restore healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies. The funding provided by SB 5540 and SB 5541 supports programs these organizations leverage to achieve the Oregon Plan's goals for enhancing watershed health and providing positive benefits to local communities.

We appreciate your time and consideration,



Ryan Gordon, Executive Director, Network of Oregon Watershed Councils

The Network of Oregon Watershed Councils is dedicated to supporting the work of nearly 90 watershed councils throughout the state by increasing council capacity, improving key relationships, and promoting public awareness of watersheds and watershed councils.



Jerry Nicolescu, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts represents, supports, and strengthens Oregon's 45 member Conservation Districts through member services, program development, training, leadership development, public education, and government relations.



Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) serves and strengthens the land trust community in Oregon. COLT's 19 member land trusts work with voluntary private land owners to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, preserve open lands, maintain working farms and retain the values that make Oregon such an attractive place to live. COLT focuses on improving and advancing land conservation in the state through increased land trust capacity and coverage, engagement of stakeholders, defending and developing new and larger sources of funding, and supportive policies.

