

**Testimony before the Joint Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee
on Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Budget, HB 5018
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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports DEQ's budget request. The services that DEQ provides—protecting the health and safety of our land, air and water—are critical to Oregon's economy and the health and quality of life of our state's residents.

Clean air, unpolluted water, thriving forests and sparkling coastlines provide countless benefits to our health and recreational opportunities in all corners of Oregon. They draw tourists to our region and help businesses attract and maintain high-caliber employees. Natural resources are some of Oregon's strongest economic drivers, and DEQ plays a leading role in protecting and maintaining these resources.

What's more, we know that the physical toll of the health problems associated with pollution are large and that pollution costs taxpayers billions of dollars in health care, lost productivity, and cleanup costs.

In order to maintain Oregon's exceptional quality of life, to confront the state's environment challenges, and to protect human health, DEQ must be adequately funded, frankly *at a level higher than what is being requested*.

We therefore urge you to fully fund the budget outlined in HB 5018 and to consider additional funding. Within DEQ's proposed budget, the packages that are a funding priority for OEC include the following.

CLEAN WATER

Oregonians across the political spectrum consistently identify water quality as their highest environmental priority. Oregonians value clean rivers, streams and lakes and expect their water to be safe to drink. In order to improve the health of our rivers and lakes and safety of our drinking water, we urge you to fund:

- **Package #120:** Updating the state's outdated and inadequate wastewater permitting information management system. This will help address the fact that Oregon has more outdated wastewater permits than any other state.
- **Package #121:** Water quality assessment. Developing a water quality data management system and providing the capacity to assess whether Oregon's waters meet water quality standards is the foundation of protecting and improving water quality. The last time Oregon updated its list of stream reaches that are water-quality impaired, the

EPA had to add numerous stream reaches to Oregon's list because Oregon DEQ lacked the resources to analyze its own toxics data.

- **Package #123: Restoring wastewater permitting.** This package includes a temporary increase in wastewater permit fees and maintains the agreed on 60/40 split between general fund and fees. The statutorily allowed 3% fee increase is not adequate to maintain existing levels of service from year to year, so this year's proposed permit increase would "catch up". A proposed budget note would specify that DEQ will hire an outside consultant to audit the wastewater permitting program to identify efficiencies and process improvements to address the huge backlog in permits that need updating. This audit should also include an assessment of what staffing levels would be necessary to process permits in a timely manner.
- **Package #126: Reducing nonpoint source pollution.** Nonpoint source pollution—pollution that comes from across the landscape in runoff from agriculture, forestry, and urban lands—is the greatest source of pollution in Oregon's waters. We have a long way to go in tackling this challenging problem to ensure our waters are swimmable, fishable and drinkable. Industry, agriculture, drinking water providers, and fisheries all depend on clean water. Restoring and adding staff to address the most important limiting factor in Oregon's rivers, streams and lakes is critical to delivering on Oregon's promise to provide clean water for Oregonians.
- **Package # 128: Clean Water Partnership.** Citizens expect the state to be able to tell them whether water quality is improving or declining, and to use this information to develop unified priorities across state programs to strategically target resources for the greatest improvement in water quality. Creating metrics and the capacity to better quantify trends in watershed health and water quality will enable the state to develop priorities and strategies at a much finer level, to leverage local, private and federal resources toward the same priorities, and to show progress over time. This is critical to successfully improving water quality and watershed health around the state, and to informing the state's discussion with federal agencies about endangered aquatic species, and responding to legal challenges to state water quality programs.

In addition, we urge you not to cut the 1 FTE in the groundwater program that is included in reduction package 090. There are only about 5 FTE working to monitor and protect Oregon's groundwater; taking this cut would mean a significant reduction in capacity. 70% of the state's population relies on groundwater as a source of drinking water, and many of our state's aquifers are already contaminated with nitrates from agricultural fertilizers and septic tanks. Making further cuts to the state's groundwater program would threaten public health. The state needs to strengthen, not cut, its capacity to protect this critical resource.

CLEAN AIR

Of all the environmental risks that people are exposed to, air pollution is the most difficult to avoid. Of particular concern in Oregon are toxic air emissions —such as diesel, benzene and formaldehyde—pollutants that are linked to cancer, birth defects and neurological damage. In order to make Oregon's air safe to breathe, we urge you to fund:

- **Package #111 – Continue Air Toxics Monitoring** for which funding was provided in the 2014 session. Monitoring is important; even more important are the DEQ programs that reduce the air toxics that are released by diesel engines, woodstoves and more.

Please keep those programs intact, and—if additional funds can be leveraged—restore positions in the Clean Diesel Initiative.

CROSSCUTTING PROTECTIONS

We urge you to fund:

- Package #132 – Materials Management, Toxics Coordinator and Green Chemistry Executive Order Implementation. Oregon is a recognized leader in the application of green chemistry, an approach that leads to the design and manufacture of inherently safer, less toxic chemicals, materials, and products. The application of green chemistry represents an important upstream strategy for more sustainable materials management and toxics reduction in the state. Oregon DEQ has an important role to play in continuing to expand the adoption of green chemistry throughout key industries, and serves as a strategic partner to universities and other agencies. Green chemistry represents an arena where Oregon can both protect the environment and human health while fostering innovation and entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, DEQ performs essential services for the residents of our great state. We hope their budget will be fully funded (and more). Thank you for consideration.