



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

March 25, 2015

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Senator Richard Devlin and Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chairs
Members of the Committee
WaysandMeans.NaturalResourcesSub@state.or.us

Re: HB 5018, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Budget – COMMENTS

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has strong positions on water quality and quantity as well as air quality, solid waste and hazardous waste—perhaps every program that DEQ oversees. In 2015, the national League celebrated its 95th-year. LWVUS was active in encouraging passage of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. LWVUS continues to advocate for protecting that foundational work. We also advocate for federal funding to implement that legislation. In Oregon, members have studied these issues, recognizing the value of having clean air, clean water and land for public health today and generations to come. With that background, we provide testimony today on DEQ's proposed budget.

We support the General Fund, Lottery Fund and fees for the base budget/activities of the department. Although this department has monies from a variety of sources, the entire dollar amount still does not provide the full funding needed for the many responsibilities of this agency.

Oregon has accepted the responsibility for implementing the federal Clean Air and Clean Water Acts through DEQ. We believe Oregon citizens are better served by that decision, but with that responsibility comes the need to be sure both administration and enforcement of those Acts are assured. Although this department is funded by many fees, the General Funds in this budget protect Oregonian's health and support our economy.

Of course, beyond the base budget, we have reviewed the Policy Option Packages (POPs) presented by the department and suggest the following priorities:

POP 128: Clean Water Partnership: During development of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, it was clear that addressing the need for data should be a priority. Data-driven policy decisions will provide the best outcomes and help focus limited state dollars on the programs that will help us meet the goal of abundant clean water for all in the future.

The development of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy provided a platform that allowed for increased cross-agency conversation. It was a great investment of taxpayer dollars and will provide a return on that investment for years to come. That project also allowed for a greater conversation with our federal agency partners. We expect that work to continue with the Clean Water Partnership work this coming biennium

POPs 150, 120, 121, 123 and 126: Assuring good water quality is a primary mission of this agency. With this package of POPs, we expect the Key Performance Measures currently listed as failing to improve. We are willing to support the concept of having an outside contractor review the agency's processes to help find ways to improve permitting outcomes. The League wants permits to be issued in a timely manner, but also with the appropriate scrutiny needed to assure we really *DO* have clean water in Oregon. We had thought that having the agency go through a Lean/Kaizen review would result in meeting these targets. But that has not been the case. We understand that the fees requested under these POPs are high and many of our members will be indirectly helping to pay for these fees through municipal wastewater bills and possible higher costs of products. But there is nothing more vital to human health than clean water. The usual expectation was that "the solution to pollution is dilution" cannot be counted on as we see reduced snowpack and more drought conditions throughout Oregon.

Onsite Septic System Loan Program (SB 246 with amendments): Local Leagues around the state have raised the issue of failing septic systems with members and with their communities. We recognize that many systems are out of date or poorly maintained, but low income property owners may not have the ability to fund improvements. In the meantime we are experiencing increasing groundwater, surface water and ocean water contamination due to these systems. Dangerous blue green algae blooms are becoming more common. It is a public health crisis that we can begin to address by passage and FUNDING of a grant and loan program to help low income Oregonians repair or replace their systems. We commend the Realtors Association for their increased notification and education program implemented with the passage of HB 3172 (2013), but that program does not address the very real need of low income Oregonians to repair or replace their failing systems.

The League also has positions on land and air quality so we do not want to ignore these packages. We have consistently supported DEQ's responsibilities related to assuring Oregonians have clean air to breathe AND our businesses can obtain the permits they need to continue to operate in Oregon. Addressing greenhouse gas issues is another expectation we have of this agency.

POP 111 related to air toxics monitoring is especially important in those locations of Oregon where air quality affects human health. Unfortunately, some of our poorest children live in areas where the air is less pure. Even though it is in a different budget, we are also supportive of the investment being made through Business Oregon to provide funding to replace old wood stoves in the Lakeview area.

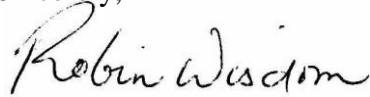
POP 132 relates to materials management. The League has been a voice for "reduce, reuse and recycle" and believes that working both with consumers and with manufacturers is good public policy.

The League provided testimony in **support of SB 262 related to POP 138**. Frankly, we are very concerned about the amount of oil flowing through our state without adequate contingency planning for all kinds of transport. This bill addresses just one small portion of a very important safety issue.

We do have reservations related to POP 124. The description says there is a need for a senior-level policy position in the Governor's office related to the Portland Harbor Superfund Site (and other high priority projects). We believe that the Dept. of State Lands and others who are now working on this important issue can competently complete the task without yet another position in the Governor's office. .

DEQ is at the core of Oregon's public health and environmental protection. It has a broad mission that, if fulfilled, affects every Oregonian. Investing in its many responsibilities is money well spent.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom
President



Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

cc: DEQ Director Dick Pedersen
Richard M. Whitman, Governor's Natural Resources Policy Director