



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

April 9, 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 5042– Water Resources Department Budget: SUPPORT

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has strong positions on both water quality and quantity. We published two reports on water issues, one in 2009 and another in 2010. We had a seat on the Integrated Water Resources Strategy Policy Advisory Group. Members attend Water Resources Commission meetings and work group meetings. As a result of that window into the department's work, we provide testimony today in support of the **General Fund and Lottery Fund request for the base budget/activities** of the department.

A reminder:

“All water within the State from all sources of water belongs to the public.”

Our next priority is funding for data collection and analysis so that transaction requests can be fairly processed and any requests for storage can be processed in a manner to assure the public's rights are protected. We include the entire ecosystem in that expected protection. There is a link between this scientific work and the need for future water storage in Oregon. The League believes that our weather is changing and that our wonderful natural storage—winter snowpack--will not provide the summer water we will need in the future. BUT storage projects need to be vetted. Where to get the water--even winter water—must be a science-based decision.

In priority order, we support:

A portion of POP 115: Place-Based Planning (**SB 266 w/amendments**)—Broad-based local communities (communities with basin area connections) will need assistance in coming together to plan for future water needs. Until that planning is done, storage projects are unlikely to find support. Although storage needs to be part of the conversation, the League is not convinced that all of the additional staff requested under this POP is timely, and perhaps in some cases should be contract work and not new department staff.

POP 110: We are interested in this proposed new position of Monitoring Coordinator. We are intrigued by the concept of data sharing and management, both ideas we support. We are especially supportive of cross-agency data sharing and, if this position can facilitate that work, it will be most valuable.

POPs 101 and 104: Again, the data collection is critical to good water management and the state's investments and interest in helping the Klamath region makes these two investments appropriate.

OP 106: We have monitored the Feasibility Studies (fondly known as SB 1069 grants) over time and believe they provide real value to local communities as they address water needs. These grants go through a rigorous vetting process so some additional monies would be well spent in local communities. But the staffing increase should be linked to the amount of increase provided. If a .25 FTE staffs \$750,000 in grant funds, then any increased FTE should be a similar ratio. It may be that this FTE could be of assistance to the other grant and loan funds so that fewer FTE would be needed across the department.

Without taking a specific position on **POPs 113 and 120**, we recognize the need for additional conservation and storage projects across the state. We will leave it to others to make the case for these funding requests.

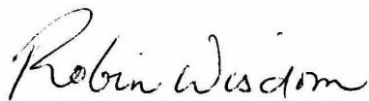
POP 105: With the need to thoughtfully consider each agency budget, we ask that you **NOT fund this new position**, whose job would be as a liaison to 11 Regional Solutions Teams across the state. The job seems overwhelming and almost impossible to accomplish. The “windshield time”—traveling around the state--would be greater than the on-the-ground work that this position could possibly accomplish. Instead, local field staff can serve to help in local areas and state staff can provide additional expertise as needed. If areas of the state are underserved by field staff, then that should be the focus of additional FTE.

We are disappointed that there is not more money in the budget for groundwater studies. As you have learned, 75% of the approximately 300 water rights applications are now for groundwater. And you have seen the statewide map where the Groundwater Vulnerability Index is spreading not just in the Umatilla, but the Klamath, Harney County, the Hood River area and a large swath of the northern Willamette Valley, where nurseries and vineyards must have water to grow their high value crops, while increased numbers of exempt wells are tapping those aquifers. We are now spending significant dollars on aquifer recharge in the Umatilla due to lack of early action on protecting that aquifer.

We would like to point out some really important connections between the Key Performance Measures (KPMs) and POPs. In 2013, the legislature supported POPs 101 to fund staff for the Water-Use Reporting Program, 103 to increase stream gages and POP 202 to provide some limited funding for groundwater work. In their budget presentation this week, the department reported increases in meeting the targets for KPMs #4, 5 and 13 that can be linked to these increased investments. Sometimes KPMs provide a window into department management issues, but as in these cases, there can be a direct link between the resources provided and the work accomplished.

We ask that you consider our testimony and provide adequate funding for the Water Resources Department for the good of Oregon.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom
President



Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

cc: Tom Byler, Water Resources Department Director
Richard M. Whitman, Governor's Natural Resources Policy Director