

May 5, 2015

Legislative Fiscal Office
Attn: Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court St. NE, Room H-178
Salem, OR 97301

To the Members of the Committee:

We are writing to encourage you to allocate a minimum of \$7 million toward levee inspections and repair through Business Oregon's Special Public Works Fund. As many members of your committee can attest, from personal experience or through the experience of constituents, Oregon's magnificent rivers carry with them a high risk of flooding. The Vanport flood of 1948 decimated what was, at the time, the state's second largest and most racially integrated city. Just 16 years later, the Christmas floods of 1964, regarded as one of the worst natural disasters in state history, delivered historic high water to the Rogue, Sandy, Willamette, Deschutes, and others rivers across the state. But these are just two major events. The Vancouver Gauge, which measures river levels near the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers, has measured three 100-year and two 500-year flood events since 1894. There is no question whether Oregon will face flooding in the future. The only question is whether we will be ready.

Right now the answer to that question is, we don't know. Many of the state's flood management systems were built in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s through partnerships between local jurisdictions, like cities, counties, drainage districts, and the United States Corps of Engineers (the Corps). Local agencies agreed to maintain the systems in trade for assistance during and after future high water events. Since then, land use patterns have changed resulting in industrial and residential development behind levee systems. Additionally, as a result of recent storms like Hurricane Katrina, the Corps and the Federal Emergency Management Agency have raised their standards for levee inspection, maintenance and repair, especially for highly developed urban areas.

Local jurisdictions are working hard to prepare, but the old model of funding flood management is no longer suited to the new reality of flood risk. For example, there are a total of just 2,000 landowners in the drainage districts in North and Northeast Portland that bear the burden of maintaining a flood management system that protects assets of value to the entire state. These assets include the Portland International Airport which accommodates 90% of all air cargo and 95% of all air passenger travel in the state. Similar situations are repeated around the state. In Warrenton, Reedsport, Springfield, Pendleton, Rainier, Sauvie Island, Scappoose, Milton-Freewater and other communities around the state, a small group of landowners or local jurisdictions have inherited the responsibility for managing floodplains with changing land uses, increased expectations from federal partners, and assets of local, regional, and state-wide economic significance.

Without state help, these communities face serious threats to their quality of life. First and foremost, failure to properly invest in flood management puts the state's citizens in harm's way. Additionally, if these communities fail to meet Corps standards, they lose federal assistance during and after high water events. Finally, failure to meet FEMA accreditation standards means that areas formerly considered to be relatively safe, will be re-designated as flood plains. Property owners will face flood insurance mandates and severe regulation of development undermining the economy.

Flood safety is critical to the survival of many of Oregon's most well recognized cultural, historical, and economic engines which include local produce in places like Sauvie Island, fishing and tourism in Reedsport and Warrenton, the many exports from Pendleton, Kingsford in Springfield, the Oregon Coast, Nike, Intel, craft beer, and the many commodities that travel through the Port of Portland.

For these reasons, we strongly encourage that the state fund the investigation and repair of its aging flood management infrastructure. Without it, many of the state's other initiatives are at risk.



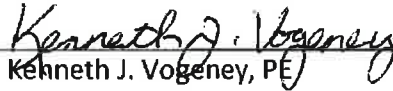
Reed Wagner, Executive Director
Multnomah County Drainage District #1



Bob Patterson, Public Works Director
City of Pendleton



Jonathan Wright, City Manager
City of Reedsport



Kenneth J. Vogeney, PE
City Engineer/Emergency Manager
City of Springfield



Laurie Mapes, Board President
Scappoose Drainage Improvement Company



Tim Couch, Executive Director
Sauvie Island Drainage Improvement Company



Kurt Fritsch, City Manager
City of Warrenton