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April 9, 2017

Senator Lew Fredrick, Co-Chair  
Representative Brad Witt, Co-Chair  
Ways and Means Sub Committee on Natural Resources

RE: Support for HB 5040

The Deschutes Land Trust supports HB 5040, directing the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to allocate funds from the Watershed Conservation Operating Fund to various state agencies and to support operations and grants in implementing the Oregon Plan for Salmon & Watersheds and the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

Having worked with the agency since its earlier incarnation as the Governor's Watershed Enhancement Board, we've seen the agency learn and mature, developing a long-term vision and more strategic approach, while continually working to leverage its impact, enhance accountability and balance process. In sum, OWEB has come a long way since its founding. Part of that success has come from trial and error, but I'd attribute much of the success to OWEB's professional staff and the willingness of the legislature to delegate decision making and prioritization to OWEB's diverse and knowledgeable board, which can invest the time in listening to local partners and communities, setting priorities and making decisions that are well informed and appropriately responsive.

OWEB's work has broad impacts through the organizations, partnerships and projects they fund. In the upper Deschutes Basin, OWEB has funded my organization, the Deschutes Land Trust through the Deschutes Partnership, composed of the Land Trust, the Deschutes River Conservancy and 2 local watershed councils, the Upper Deschutes and the Crooked River. As an example of our successes, on Whychus Creek, our voluntary collaboration with private landowners on land and water conservation and ultimately habitat restoration, has brought a historically important waterway back to life. Once a primary producer of salmon & steelhead in the upper Deschutes, Whychus Creek dried up nearly every summer due to the over-appropriation of streamflow for irrigation; wet meadow floodplain habitat had been converted to pasture and residences; the stream channel straightened and simplified with a loss of the complex natural structure necessary for fish as well as the ability of the stream to recharge the local aquifer; fish passage was blocked by unscreened irrigation diversions.

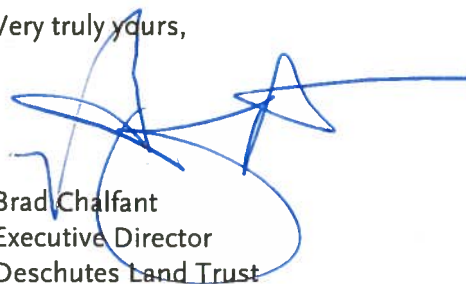
Our voluntary, collaborative approach has been slow and at times challenging, but it's been possible because OWEB was able to take the long view and stand with us. As a result, over the past 20 years the Deschutes Partnership has:

- Restored streamflows through irrigation efficiency, with Whychus Creek now on the verge of permanently meeting state minimum streamflows, while local irrigators today have a far more reliable, efficient and manageable water supply.
- Irrigation diversions have been consolidated, modernized, screened and fish passage restored.
- Despite rapid local growth, key floodplain and wetland properties have been permanently protected, avoiding or reducing future property claims from periodic flooding.
- Having avoided further conversion or fragmentation of the floodplain, extensive stream reaches and floodplain property is being restored and the aquifer recharged.
- Water quality and wildlife habitat in and along Whychus Creek is steadily improving, as recovering riparian areas provide additional shade, stability and structure, water temperature drops, while erosion and sedimentation is reduced.
- Our local community now enjoys new educational and recreational access to Whychus Creek, which has contributed to a stronger sense of community and added to our quality of life.
- Having embraced this approach, our local community has stepped up to provide additional private financial resources to match and leverage OWEB's public funding.
- Impressed with our success and the community's embrace of the collaborative effort, federal agencies agreed to provide a "safe legal harbor" under the Endangered Species Act for landowners who unintentionally injure or "take" a listed steelhead.

Together, the Deschutes Partnership, our many community partners, agencies and funders have collaborated to bring a long dead stream back to life. That is no small achievement and we did it in a way that respected local values, benefitted local landowners and ultimately the entire community. Our work unfolds slowly -- one landowner, one project, one community at a time, but it's proving that local, collaborative partnerships can solve thorny natural resource issue when given enough time and the financial resources that OWEB has been able to offer.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to testify in support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and HB 5040.

Very truly yours,



Brad Chalfant  
Executive Director  
Deschutes Land Trust  
(541) 330-0017