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Testimony in Support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Boards Budget

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Submitted by: The Nature Conservancy

Senator Frederick, Representative Witt and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) budget.

The Nature Conservancy was a key supporter of the ballot measures that established OWEB and made the program a permanent part of how Oregonians take care of the environment. In supporting these ballot measures our goal was to dedicate state resources to a grant program to advance voluntary actions to improve fish and wildlife habitat conservation.

The value of OWEB's grant program to nature and people was strongly endorsed in 2010 when 69 percent of voters and a majority in every county in the state voted yes for Measure 76. In casting their vote for Measure 76, voters were voicing support for dedicating 65 percent of the lottery revenues to voluntary conservation action supported by grants to entities other than state or federal agencies and use of the funds to restore and protect habitat and the related assessment, planning, design, technical assistance and monitoring to ensure completion of successful projects and sound investment of the funds.

Over the past 18 years OWEB has helped landowners, Watershed Councils, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Land Trusts and other conservation non-governmental organizations provide access to and restore thousands of miles of stream habitat, restore wetlands and protect and improve grassland, forest and desert habitats. OWEB has a good track record for efficiently managing a grant program. Investment in watershed health grants not only help fish and wildlife, they provide a wide range of benefits to people. They produce immediate and ongoing benefits to people by supporting natural resource related jobs, filtering stormwater runoff, sequestering carbon and enhancing human health. By fostering collaboration across interest groups, the grant program provides opportunities to broaden Oregonian's understanding of the kinds of natural resource challenges we face, as well as the practical solutions we can generate when we work together.

We fully appreciate the magnitude of the challenges legislators face in producing a balanced budget for the 2017-2019 biennium. However, **we urge you to vote to protect 65 percent of state's constitutionally-dedicated Measure 76 lottery revenue to be used for grants to Watershed Councils, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Land Trusts and other conservation NGO's as the voters intended in 2010.**

The Nature Conservancy is a global, science-based, collaborative conservation organization that works locally in 69 countries and all 50 United States; we were incorporated in Oregon in 1961. The Nature Conservancy works to advance terrestrial, freshwater and marine conservation that provides benefits to people and nature. With offices in Enterprise, Burns, Bend, Klamath Falls, Medford, Eugene, The Dalles and Portland we work with a broad range of Oregonians to accomplish our mission. The Nature Conservancy has over 50,000 supporters in Oregon, with members in every county in the state.

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