

**Testimony on Senate Bill 5542 before the
Ways and Means Natural Resources Joint Subcommittee**

Tom Wolf, Trout Unlimited

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Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Senate Bill 5542, the proposed budget for the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) for the 2017-2019 fiscal years. My name is Tom Wolf and I represent Trout Unlimited (TU), the largest conservation organization in the country dedicated to the conservation of coldwater fishes, such as trout and salmon, and their habitats. Trout Unlimited has more than 3,000 active members in Oregon and approximately 155,000 national members.

Oregon's cold-water fish populations are of significant cultural and economic value yet their persistence is threatened by several stressors including climate change, drought conditions (which are expected to occur with increasing frequency) and population growth. These factors and others will continue to place increasing pressure on the water resources of the State and Oregon's ecosystems. To ensure that Oregon is prepared to meaningfully address these challenges it must take action to acquire basic information about the condition of its water resources, implement and incentivize better water management practices and take action to ensure sufficient water remains instream for sensitive fish species. Accordingly, TU supports Senate Bill 5542 and efforts to ensure that OWRD has sufficient resources to meaningfully implement its mandates. TU offers the following comments on specific budget requests.

I. Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) Budget Request

a. Package 100: Sustaining Current Service Levels: Water Rights Transactions and Dam Safety Fee Schedule Increase and Add-Back Package

In order to adequately manage the State's water resources, OWRD must have sufficient funds to, at a minimum, maintain its existing level of service. OWRD's existing water right transactions and dam safety fee schedule sunsets June 30, 2017 and reverts to 2009 levels. Accordingly, TU supports this package (and related legislation HB 2295) which ensures the current level of service through 2021.

b. Package 105: Responsible Water Management (SUPPORT) High Priority

TU strongly supports this package and considers it among the highest priorities for the OWRD budget. Watermaster workloads continue to increase statewide due to a number of factors including an increasing number of water rights/water conflicts in all basins, yet assistant watermaster positions have declined from 37 in 1981 to 12 in 2016. These positions are critical

to ensuring effective water management throughout the state and their importance will deepen as drought and climate change continue to increase competition for water resources.

c. Package 101: Understanding Our Water Resources (SUPPORT) High Priority

TU strongly supports this package which will facilitate the acquisition of critical information necessary for effective management of Oregon's water resources. Specifically, this information will allow the state to manage its increasingly limited groundwater resources, and maximize the consumptive and non-consumptive uses of water in the basin. This package anticipates resources sufficient to carry out groundwater basin studies in two high priority basins. This is a positive and necessary first step however ideally resources would be allocated such that studies could timely proceed in the other high priority basins as well. Groundwater is becoming increasingly relied upon in certain basins especially during drought conditions yet it is impossible to ascertain the impacts of this use on the aquifer, surface streams and dependent ecosystems without sufficient information. It is critical that groundwater be extracted sustainably in a way that meets both human needs and the needs of species and ecosystems.

d. Package 104: Time Limited Place Based Planning (SUPPORT at current level of funding)

TU considers it a high priority to ensure sufficient resources to assess the outcomes of the current place-based planning efforts. There is great potential for place-based planning to be an effective water management strategy into the future as it promotes collaborative integrated water management efforts at the local level. There are currently four pilot projects in various stages of development and this package would ensure that these projects have the resources to complete their efforts. It is important to see the results of these initial efforts however before additional funding is allocated for this program. Therefore TU only supports a level of funding that will ensure the completion of the existing pilot programs.

e. Package 102: Protecting the Public and Water Supplies through Dam Safety Inspection (SUPPORT)

f. Package 103: Protecting Groundwater Resources through Well Construction (SUPPORT)

g. Package 110: Grants and Loans to Implement Water Projects (SUPPORT)

h. Package 106: Payroll Shared Services: (SUPPORT)

TU supports this package and believes it is a cost-effective approach to cost-share this effort with the Department of State Lands.

i. Package 109: Grants to Evaluate the Feasibility of Potential Water Projects (NEUTRAL)

TU does not actively support this package as it is not clear that these funds will be used and/or prioritized for projects that benefit multiple beneficial uses including fish and wildlife. TU recommends that, if these funds are approved, that the program guidelines be modified to promote projects that better balance water needs and help provide environmental flows in priority basins. At present, we believe funds are better spent on the other packages noted above.

TU appreciates the opportunity to comment on OWRD's proposed budget and looks forward to engaging in the continuing discussions.