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## **Testimony to the Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources on Senate Bill 5542**

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Oregon Environmental Council**

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council supports robust funding for the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD). WRD provides vital services to manage and balance use of Oregon's limited water resources for growing communities, businesses, farms and Oregon's iconic rivers and wildlife.

As noted in the December, 2016 Secretary of State Audit Report, parts of the state are experiencing regular and large scale water shortages, and this trend is expected to continue and worsen. Most of the state's rivers are fully, if not over allocated in dry months, and most new applications for water rights are to tap groundwater sources – yet the availability and sustainability of groundwater supplies in many of Oregon's aquifers are unknown. To ensure current and future sustainable management of Oregon's precious water supplies, WRD must have the staffing and resources to gather and analyze critical data, conduct groundwater basin studies, provide on-the-ground monitoring and balancing of water use and oversight of new well construction. In the upcoming biennium, we strongly support focusing funding to these efforts.

Specifically, we support the water resource management policy package 101 which adds capacity for WRD to conduct groundwater investigations. WRD has completed groundwater investigations in three basins and a fourth is underway, but with an additional fifteen studies yet to be completed, we recommend a significant increase in funding in addition to package 101.

We also support full funding of packages 105 and 107, increasing water management field staff statewide and in the Umatilla. Watermasters, assistant watermasters and hydrographic technicians provide crucial services to support water right holders and instream water needs. The number of personnel needed to carry out these duties across the state is inadequate, and the Integrated Water Resources Strategy calls for building field capacity to fill this shortfall. Packages 105 and 107 provide for critically needed staff.

We also support policy packages 102 and 103 to protect public safety and water supplies. Aging dams throughout the state pose threats to public safety, and improperly installed

wells can result in contamination of groundwater sources. Packages 102 and 103 provide for needed engineers and inspectors to oversee dam safety and proper well construction.

We are also very concerned about potential reductions in key programs related to data collection, analysis and water management. We urge inclusion of ARB policy package 108 in the WRD biennial budget, and that the following suggested reductions be rejected:

- \$157,000 for the Water Measurement Cost Share Program Revolving Fund
- \$200,000 for new observation wells and \$188,000 for groundwater study
- \$120,000 for gaging stations
- \$373,000 for management and coordination positions and \$150,000 for an adjudications processor

The time is now to make adequate investment in understanding and sustainably managing our water resources for all. Thank you for your consideration.