



April 13, 2017

Sen. Frederick, Rep. Witt, and the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

Oregon Conservation Network Testimony on SB 5542, the Water Resources Department Budget

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick, Witt, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 5542, the budget bill for the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD).

The Oregon Conservation Network (OCN) is coordinated through the Oregon League of Conservation Voters. OCN is a coalition of nearly 40 not-for-profit organizations throughout the state, united to advocate for pro-conservation legislation and to fight policies that threaten our state's natural legacy. OCN is powered by tens of thousands of Oregonians who belong to their membership organizations. We work to protect funding for natural resource agencies and programs, as well as policy that will ensure a better Oregon for our children.

We strongly encourage your support and approval of SB 5542, WRD's proposed 2017-2019 budget. As the Legislature and the Governor's Office consider reductions to WRD's budget, we encourage the consideration of WRD's value in protecting Oregon's precious water resources. In order to preserve our state's valuable resources for future Oregonians, we must prioritize our natural resource agencies' budgets today.

We are also supportive of a number of Policy Option Packages that will go a long way in protecting Oregon's water. Particularly, we support:

- Package 100 - Maintaining Current Fee schedule of water rights transaction and dam safety fee.
 - In order to adequately manage the State's water resources, WRD 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, we support this package (and related legislation HB 2295) which ensures the current level of service through 2021.
- Package 101 - Water Basin Study
 - OCN strongly supports the GRB's recommended 1.8 million dollars for basin studies.

- Thus far only three groundwater investigations have been completed in three of Oregon's nineteen river basins (Deschutes, Upper Klamath and Willamette);
 - With one currently underway in Harney County.
- With groundwater becoming increasingly relied upon in certain basins especially during drought conditions 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 Oregon's species and ecosystems.
- Package 102, and 103 - Dam and well construction inspectors
 - OCN supports Packages 102 and 103. Protecting the public and water supplies through dam safety inspections and groundwater resources through well construction are well worth the state's investment.
- Package 104 - Place Based Planning Coordinators
 - We support time limited funding for the Place Based Planning Coordinators to stay with the planning processes through completion.
 - Four pilot place based planning efforts in the
 - Malheur, Mid Coast, Grande Ronde and John Day Basins.
 - Water Resources oversight and involvement in these planning processes is critical, however, as these are pilot projects we would not support expanding this package to support further place based planning efforts in other basins.
- Package 105 - Watermaster
 - 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 only deepen as drought and climate change continue to increase competition for water resources.
- Package 106 – Payroll Shared Services
 - I would be remiss if I did not share my support and applaud what we hope will be on-going cross agency services sharing.

In conclusion, we ask that the Subcommittee support SB 5542 and approve WRD's proposed 2017-2019 budget. We believe WRD's work is of vital importance to our members and the invaluable services it provides for the future of all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Paige Spence
 Oregon Conservation Network Director
 Oregon League of Conservation Voters