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Testimony in Support of SB 5542 Oregon Water Resources Department 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 Water Resource Department's Governor's Recommended budget.**

The Nature Conservancy is a global, science-based, collaborative conservation organization that works locally in 69 countries and all 50 United States. The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

The Nature Conservancy was incorporated in Oregon in 1961; we have over 50,000 supporters in Oregon, with members in every county in the state. With offices in Enterprise, Burns, Bend, Klamath Falls, Medford, Eugene, The Dalles and Portland we work with a broad range of state agencies and Oregonians to accomplish our mission. The Nature Conservancy holds significant water rights in Oregon for agricultural uses compatible with our conservation goals.

The Oregon Department of Water Resources provides a wide range of benefits to Oregonians – including benefits to our economy and our quality of life. We have continuing concerns about the impacts budget limitations are having on the Department's ability to carry out the responsibilities they have been given to protect such a critical state resource. Because of this, The Nature Conservancy supports many elements of the Governor's recommended budget for the Department.

We want to highlight the importance of investing in Policy Option Package 101 identified in the Governor's Recommended Budget to fund additional groundwater studies in Oregon. The Nature Conservancy strongly supports the recommended \$1,800,000 for additional groundwater investigations. With overallocation of water in most of our rivers for out of stream uses, more people are turning to groundwater.

Groundwater is a vital source of water that sustains both ecosystems and human communities worldwide. Wetlands, rivers, and lakes often receive inflow from groundwater; it provides late-summer flow for many rivers, and creates cool-water upwellings critical for

aquatic species during the summer heat. At the same time, groundwater is an important source for irrigation and domestic, municipal, and industrial uses.

Over the past ten years, Conservancy freshwater scientists have worked to improve Oregon's collective understanding of the importance of groundwater to the state's fish and wildlife. We also have developed methods to support science-based decision-making regarding how to balance water use for people and nature. Yet these methods – and many others used by the Water Resources Department to make decisions about groundwater management – require data about the amount and quality of water available from different aquifers. **Without additional data to make decisions on how to allocate groundwater the chances of creating future problems for people and nature are highly likely.** Oregon's 2012 Integrated Water Resources Strategy identified additional investment in groundwater investigations as a priority action.

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 keep the Oregon Water Resources Department's Policy Option Package 101 in the budget.