



## Oregon Farm Bureau Supports Continued State Investment in the Oregon Water Resources Department

Co-Chairs Frederick and Witt and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) budget. The Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) strongly supports general fund investment in the OWRD, particularly in several key program areas that are important to our membership.

By way of background, OFB is Oregon's largest grassroots agriculture association, representing 7,000 farming and ranching families across the state. Our mission is to promote educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement for our members and the farming, ranching, and natural resources industry as a whole.

Water is the lifeblood for Oregon's farmers and ranchers; it is essential for the Oregon's agricultural economy. Agriculture contributes an estimated \$50 billion dollars to the state's economy, making it Oregon's second largest economic driver. Given the importance of water to all of Oregon's 220+ commodities, we have a strong interest in ensuring that the OWRD is adequately funded.

OFB wishes to express our particular support for the following packages:

- **Package #100: Transaction Fee Increase.** While our members are facing increases in costs across their operations, they understand that the Department is facing increased costs that could result in decreased staffing levels in water transactions without a fee increase. We are committed to honoring the 50/50 split agreement between fees and general fund for this program. Our members will agree to the transaction fee increase proposed in HB 2295 provided that the Department gets its matching fee increase through Package #100, and provided that no additional water rights fees are imposed.
- **Package #101: Groundwater Studies.** Investment in good data and information about groundwater resources is critical to effective management of those resources. We support increased general fund investment for groundwater studies which benefit all Oregonians. Recently, OFB has been very active in the Harney County rulemaking and subsequent study to determine the state of the groundwater resources in the county. Groundwater studies will aid in management and help ensure that the Department is using the best information to make management decisions. Moving forward, we would like to see the Department adopt a collaborative approach to these studies, like has been undertaken in Harney County.

- **Package #105: Watermasters.** Having adequate water masters on the ground is essential to ensuring our water rights system is fairly administered. OFB supports this investment in water master positions.
- **Package #109 and #100: Feasibility Studies and Grant and Loan Funds.** Increased investment in conservation and development of new water supply is critical to our long-term water future. OFB has long-championed state investment in studying and developing conservation and supply development projects that have benefits for water users, fisheries and wildlife and the state. We strongly support these packages.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed budget for the Oregon Water Resources Department. Please contact me if you have any questions.

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