



April 13, 2017

To: Co-Chair Senator Lew Frederick, Co-Chair Representative Brad Witt, and Members of Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 5542 – Oregon Water Resources Department 2017-19 Budget

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Witt, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is writing to voice our strong support for the State's investment in water resources as outlined in the Governor's proposed 2017-2019 Budget. The budget package includes funding elements that will be addressed in this subcommittee as well as the capital construction subcommittee—all of which are necessary for a holistic and sustainable approach to managing Oregon's water resources.

OWRC is a nonprofit association representing irrigation districts, water control districts, improvement districts, drainage districts and other government entities delivering agricultural water supplies. The water stewards we represent operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower production, and deliver water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. We advocate for common sense water policies that move Oregon's economy, communities, and environment toward a secure water future. We commend your continued hard work in designing a balanced budget that meets the needs of all Oregonians and ask that you include investments in water supply management and development in your final budget package.

OWRC has a strong interest in water conservation, supply and innovation. The entities we represent and the thousands of water users they supply embody the associations founding principles to promote the development, control, conservation, preservation and utilization of land and water resources of the State of Oregon. Our members are also a vital component of Oregon's economic engine, delivering water supplies to grow food and fiber sold and consumed locally, nationally, and globally. The ability of our members to prudently manage water resources is intrinsically tied to the capacity of the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD) to provide data, process transactions, and invest in water projects.

There are several key funding areas that we request be included in WRD's 2017-2019 Budget:

- ◆ Support Community Water Planning – Helping communities plan for water needs through Place-Based Planning and Feasibility Studies; Package #104
- ◆ Funding Feasibility Studies – Additional grant funding for the Water Conservation, Reuse and Storage grant program, created by SB 1069 in 2008; Package #109
- ◆ Funding Water Supply Projects – Additional grant and loan funds for the Water Supply Development Account, created by SB 839 in 2013; Package #110
- ◆ Increased Data Collection and Field Coordination – Supports essential data collection to better understand ground and surface water resources; maximizes field staff presence, strengthens core agency functions and supports the Integrated Water Resources programs; Packages #101, #105
- ◆ Efficient Processing of Water Rights Transactions – Increases fees to sustain current service levels for processing variety of water rights transactions; maintains balance between General Fund and water user fees; Package #100

In light of climate change and an increase in extreme weather events, it is imperative that Oregon make a concerted investment in water resources now. In the last biennium, OWRD awarded millions of dollars in feasibility and implementation grants throughout the state. These grant funds have gone to a variety of projects that include conservation, efficiency and increased water supply. Continuing to invest in Oregon's water supply today through these important programs will ensure that future generations have adequate water supplies that support thriving communities, flourishing industries, and healthy ecosystems.

We recognize the difficult choices you are faced with and commend you for your efforts in funding Oregon's natural resources agencies. The costs associated with planning for and meeting our water needs greatly exceed the current available resources but continuing to make small investments at the state level can catalyze and leverage local and federal funding. A mix of General Fund dollars to support WRD's core functions combined with a modest bonding package for planning, feasibility, and implementation of water projects is prudent investment that will pay dividends to current and future generations of Oregonians. As a whole, providing funding for the aforementioned components in the 2017-2019 Budget will not only help Oregon make progress in meeting its diverse water supply needs, it will also strengthen our state's economy, empower local communities, and assist in restoring the environment we all share.

Thank you for considering Oregon's water supply needs in your ongoing efforts to provide a balanced budget for the 2017-2019 biennium.

Sincerely,
April Snell
Executive Director