

**Testimony on Senate Bill 5530 before the
Capitol Construction Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee**

Tom Wolf, Trout Unlimited

May 19, 2017



Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on Senate Bill 5530. This legislation authorizes bond funds for, among other items, the Oregon Water Resources Department's (OWRD) Water Supply Development Account (Water Project Grants and Loans) and Water Conservation, Reuse and Storage Investment Grant Fund (Feasibility Grants). My name is Tom Wolf and I represent Trout Unlimited (TU), the largest conservation organization in the country dedicated to the conservation of coldwater fishes, such as trout and salmon, and their habitats. Trout Unlimited has more than 3,000 active members in Oregon and approximately 155,000 national members.

Oregon's cold-water fish populations are of significant cultural and economic value yet their persistence is threatened by several stressors including climate change, drought conditions (which are expected to occur with increasing frequency) and population growth. These factors and others will continue to place increasing pressure on the water resources of the State and Oregon's ecosystems. The Water Project Grants and Loans and Feasibility Grants are mechanisms that OWRD has utilized to encourage planning and projects that help it address these challenges and better meet long-term water management goals.

TU primarily supports authorization of funds for the Water Supply Development Fund. This fund requires that projects provide benefits in three different categories: economic, environmental and social/cultural. The types of projects that can utilize these funds include fish protection projects and watershed enhancement projects. TU appreciates that this fund prioritizes multi-benefit projects as efficient and effective means to achieve water management goals. TU has implemented cooperative multi-benefit conservation projects throughout the State, many funded in part by this program.

TU also supports the Feasibility Grant Program however we request that the program guidelines be modified to promote projects that better balance water needs and help provide environmental flows in priority basins. At present, it is not clear that these funds will be used and/or prioritized for projects that benefit multiple beneficial uses including fish and wildlife. Many natural resource agency budgets are strained and the outlook for their future funding is uncertain. It is imperative that available resources be spent in the most effective manner possible.

Additionally, TU understands that the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (DBBC) has requested that SB 5530 be modified to include 25 million dollars to cost-share water conservation projects in the Deschutes Basin. TU is a stakeholder in several ongoing processes in the Deschutes

Basin, including the collaborative Deschutes Basin Study Workgroup (Workgroup). The Workgroup seeks to develop a broadly-shared basis for sustainable water management in the Upper Deschutes Basin. The Workgroup is particularly focused on finding solutions to restore flows to the Upper Deschutes River and conservation projects have been identified as key mechanism to do so. Accordingly, TU supports DBBC's intended use of these funds to implement water conservation projects that will "return water supplies, with senior water rights, into the Deschutes River and its tributaries to improve habitat conditions for Oregon spotted frog, steelhead, salmon and other fish and wildlife species." While we support this intent, we note that it is currently unclear how the DBBC will ensure that the conserved water will be protected instream. TU recommends that any funds authorized to meet this request be conditioned on DBBC providing assurances that it will utilize the Conserved Water Act to protect conserved flows instream.

TU appreciates the opportunity to comment on SB 5530 and looks forward to engaging in the continuing discussions.