

**Testimony on House Bill 2297 before the  
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources**

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Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 2297. My name is Tom Wolf and I represent Trout Unlimited, 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.

House Bill 2297 concerns the Water Conservation, Reuse and Storage Grant program. The grant program was established by Senate Bill 1069 (passed in 2008) and its resulting scope was the product of careful compromise between many diverse stakeholders. HB 2297 proposes to expand that scope by including new categories of projects that are eligible to receive funds pursuant to the Feasibility Study Grant piece of the program. The Feasibility Study Grant program currently provides match funding for project planning studies performed to evaluate the feasibility of developing water conservation, reuse or storage projects. HB 2297 would expand the Feasibility Grant Program to include certain projects as eligible for funding including water management and conservation plans for small communities and irrigation districts not required by law to have a plan and plans to mitigate the impacts of drought or increase regional drought resiliency.

TU has concerns with expanding the scope of projects eligible to receive funding pursuant to the Water Conservation, Reuse and Storage Grant program. First, TU is concerned that the proposed language does not expressly require that the drought plans consider the needs of instream water users in addition to out-of-stream appropriators. TU agrees that drought conditions have and will continue to impact Oregon's water supplies and that proper planning is key to avoiding or mitigating these impacts. However, drought impacts extend to fish and wildlife resources and these resources require sufficient quantity and quality of water to complete their essential life functions. Additionally, the people and communities that depend on healthy populations of fish and wildlife for their livelihoods or recreation also acutely feel the impacts of drought. Therefore, if the Legislature does choose to fund drought planning, TU requests that the language specifically state that the needs of aquatic and riparian species must be given equal consideration to out of stream uses in any drought management plan that is seeking funding pursuant to the proposed provisions.

Further, if the scope of eligible projects is expanded to include new projects such as water management and conservation plans, it should also include projects that seek to understand or meet instream needs especially during times of drought. Such efforts could include funds to complete instream flow studies or water acquisition and transfer projects that aim to secure more water instream for fish and wildlife resources. Doing so will help ensure that a balanced portfolio of drought management projects moves forward in Oregon.

Finally, we question whether this legislation will most effectively advance the goal of preparing Oregon for future drought conditions. Extensive drought planning is already completed in a variety of ways across the state. While planning is certainly necessary, actions to implement the planning are equally as important. TU is concerned about significant and continuing investments in drought planning that often don't lead to actual changes in water management or infrastructure. With frequency, such plans are placed on a shelf, without further action. The Feasibility Grant Program in its existing form is already available to provide support for developing solutions oriented projects that can address many drought needs.

TU appreciates the opportunity to comment on HB 2297 and looks forward to engaging in the continuing discussions.