

**Testimony Presented by
John J. Audley
On behalf of the Oregon Business Council Water Project**

before the

**House Interim Committee on Water
Oregon State Legislature
December 16, 2020**

Regarding the Oregon Business Council Water Project

My name is John Audley, and I serve as a consultant to the Oregon Business Council on a variety of rural and natural resource-related issues. I am testifying on behalf of OBC's water project, as well as my colleague and friend, Professor Martin Doyle of the Duke University Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy.

When we [testified before you last September](#), we outlined the OBC Water Project, launched in October of 2019. Designed to build off the foundational work initiated by Governor Kate Brown's water vision, our project examined a wider set of challenges facing Oregon's approach to water management in an era of climate change, rapid demographic shifts, and frustrations expressed by nearly all parties over Oregon's management of this critical natural resource.

As a result of our public testimony and continued outreach to stakeholder groups over the course of this project, our analysis of Oregon's water management challenges has changed significantly. We've strengthened our analysis, added new information and perspectives, and filled in a number of gaps. Professor Doyle has made use of his research projects at Duke, along with primary data from Oregon communities, to deeply examine the challenge of water service affordability, building an interactive database that we will share with you in January. Along with so many others, we now know first-hand just how hard it is to access and use Oregon water data, just as we have learned how difficult it is for water projects of all kinds to secure permits from a seemingly unfathomable array of state and federal agencies.

But while our analysis has improved markedly since the previous version we shared with you and others, our core imperatives have not. If Oregon hopes to overcome the many challenges it faces regarding water management now and for future generations, together we must take steps to 1) regionalize water management, 2) modernize our data use and management system, 3) change the culture of water permitting to promote problem solving over litigation, and 4) ensure that quality water is available and affordable for all Oregonians. Along with the two key issues discovered by Governor Brown's water vision exercise – funding and financing

and building local capacity to make water management decisions – we feel that we now have a full picture of the challenges we all must face as we modernize Oregon water management.

We understand that your first priority for the 2021 legislative session is to address the unprecedented number of other, more pressing challenges facing the state. We have heard from you that neither you nor your staff have the bandwidth to do the deep dive required to chart a path to water management modernization.

As part of the 2020 Oregon Business Leadership Summit, [Water Committee Chair Ken Helm and Committee Member Representative Mark Owens spoke alongside OBC Water Project Chair Maria Pope](#) about how to set the stage for meaningful reform. Their message to OBC was straightforward: Organize a non-partisan, fact-based, seminar series to help members of this committee and other interested stakeholders develop a much better understanding of key water management and stewardship challenges. We have accepted that challenge and, upon completion of our report sometime in January, we will begin to engage with other stakeholders and with you on this work. Our job will not be to develop recommendations per se, but to sort through the information to find the best, nonpartisan, fact-based information and present it to you and others for discussion. We will use Professor Doyle's knowledge and relationships around the country to draw lessons from efforts in other states to address similar challenges.

On behalf of the Oregon Business Council, as we have done in other policy areas from poverty alleviation to education and adult continuing education to promoting greater opportunities for all, we pledge to meet the highest standards of honesty, professionalism, non-partisanship, and commitment to the prosperity of all Oregonians.