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## **Testimony to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports the Oregon Department of Agriculture's (ODA) Lower Umatilla Groundwater Monitoring and Coordination Policy Option Package #350.

In 1990, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) declared a Groundwater Management Area (GWMA) in the Lower Umatilla Basin due to elevated nitrate levels in groundwater. Since the GWMA declaration, ODA has been extensively involved in local efforts to address agricultural nitrate contributions through its programs to address water quality. While there have been improvements to groundwater quality, there has not been sufficient progress to allow the area to be de-designated.

Recently stakeholders in the basin, including producers, municipalities and businesses, have expressed interest in greater coordination and leadership among several key natural resource agencies, including ODA, DEQ, and OWRD. They are interested in working collaboratively with the agencies and others to achieve the goal of meeting the regulatory criteria for removing the area's Groundwater Management Area designation.

The purpose of this package is to provide leadership and facilitation to stakeholders in the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area (LUBGWMA), develop measurable objectives, and identify monitoring needs. We agree with ODA's assessment that the facilitation and leadership funded by this POP will help establish mutually satisfactory criteria, targets and a strategic plan to achieve progress and ultimately removal of the area's GWMA designation.

In addition to direct benefit to the LUBGWMA, this work will also help inform the agencies' work in other GWMA's. The measurable objectives, milestones and timelines developed as part of the exit strategy will also be incorporated into the Umatilla and Willow Creek Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plans for Willow Creek.

The \$250,000 funding request for POP #350 will fund a facilitator from the Institute for Natural Resources (INR) to support greater coordination and leadership between the state agencies involved, and to help guide the GWMA advisory group toward achieving an exit strategy from the GWMA designation, similar to what has been accomplished in other GWMA's.

Additional monitoring will be funded to determine the effects of current nutrient and irrigation water strategies on nutrient movement below crop root zones and ultimately groundwater quality, thus documenting the effectiveness of nitrate pollution prevention and reduction practices. Data gathered through those monitoring efforts will be evaluated every two years against the measurable objectives as part of the biennial reviews of these area plans.

Oregon Environmental Council urges the committee to fully fund POP#350.