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Testimony in support of the Water Resources Department 2019-20 budget

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Submitted by: Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Director of Conservation Programs, The Nature Conservancy

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I am testifying today in support of the Water Resources Department 2019-20 budget.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based and non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. The organization has over 70,000 supporters statewide with members in every county in Oregon. Our staff, based in communities across the state, work collaboratively with tribes, government agencies, elected officials, landowners, businesses, and stakeholders to develop solutions to the challenges facing people and nature.

TNC supports the State's investment in water resources as outlined in the Governor's proposed 2019-2021 Budget and commends your hard work in crafting a balanced budget that includes strong investments in Oregon's water and the economy, communities, and environment that depend upon a secure water future.

There are several key funding areas for the Oregon Water Resources Department that we request be included in the 2019-2021 Budget:

Package 101: Place Based Planning Community Support (\$979,950) – Provides funding support for current planning groups in Harney-Malheur Lake, Lower John Day, Mid-Coast, and Upper Grande Ronde, as well as conducting an evaluation of the place-based approach to water planning.

Package 102: Groundwater Data, Management, and Protection (\$2,837,027) – Increases the state's understanding of water supplies by allowing the Department to conduct one additional groundwater study at a time, while also preparing other basins for study and conducting more timely groundwater right reviews.

Note: While we support Package 102, TNC requests it be funded at \$9,000,000 as proposed in HB 2856 - HB 2856 would direct \$9,000,000 to the Water Resources Department to fund groundwater studies. It would also direct the department to provide a 10-year plan to the Legislature that prioritizes groundwater studies. Groundwater investigations take time and resources to complete—estimates for completing groundwater studies in the remaining unstudied aquifers range from \$45-75 million. HB 2856 would provide a more significant down payment on that effort than Package 102.

Package 104: Protecting the Public Through Dam Safety (\$100,000) – TNC supports the funding to develop a business case analysis of the need for investment in water infrastructure (\$100k). These funds will allow the agency to consider the best water funding strategies to produce a positive return on investment as well as the consequences to Oregon if future funding is lacking for water infrastructure.

We also support the following WRD Policy Option Packages that were not included in the Governor’s request budget for 2019-2021:

- **Package 103: Resolving Complex Water Issues (\$1,362,009)** – Funds three new Regional Basin Coordinators responsible for working with parties involved in complex water management issues to assist in developing solutions in the Willamette Basin, Deschutes Basin, and the Umatilla Basin, along with ongoing issues in other parts of the state.
- **Package 108: Improving Water Use Measurement and Reporting (\$1,428,313)** – This package proposes field and technical services staff to increase compliance with water use measurement requirements, work with water users in the field to install measuring devices, educate water users on proper techniques for measuring water use, monitor devices previously installed, provide quality control / assurance of incoming data, and coordinate with the water-masters and other staff.

Providing funding for the packages listed in this letter will not only help Oregon make progress in 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 your consideration of Oregon’s water supply in the 2019-2021 budget.

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