



## **HB 5043 Oregon Water Resources Department Budget**

### **Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon**

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Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's rivers, lakes and streams. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

**WaterWatch supports full funding of the Oregon Water Resources Department's base budget.** And while we believe that all of the agency Policy Option Packages (POPs) are worthwhile, we would request particular consideration of **POP 108 (Measurement and Reporting), POP 102(Groundwater Studies/Data), POP 106 (Water Management in the Field), and POP 103 (Resolving Complex Water Issues).**

Basic management of Oregon's water resources is one of the state's most critical environmental and economic challenges. Surface waters in eighteen out of nineteen of Oregon's river basins are already over appropriated from the late spring through the early fall. Similarly, groundwater aquifers are being over-tapped in many areas of the state. At the same time, population growth and climate change are increasing the pressure on Oregon's waterways and aquifers. Yet, the OWRD is understaffed for the essential jobs it must perform. If Oregon wants a sustainable water future, it is critical that Oregon make an adequate investment in water management and science to move forward towards addressing the challenges facing this state.

In recent years the state has developed a number of planning documents to try to help guide the state to a sustainable water future, including the Integrated Water Resources Strategy and the Oregon Water Resources Department Strategic Plan 2019-2024. Both of those documents put a heavy emphasis on responsible water management and the role that data plays in this work.

To that end, WaterWatch supports the OWRD's base budget request and also additional POPs (at the ARB levels) that will further the water management services of the OWRD including, in particular, critical science, management, field and data staff/work.

POP 108 Improving Water Use Measurement and Reporting: Water measurement and reporting is the cornerstone of effective water management; what gets measured gets managed. Currently, less than 20% of water right holders measure and report their water use. Both the Integrated Water Resources Strategy and the OWRD's Strategic Plan identify improvements of measurement and reporting as recommended actions. This work is needed to water distribution and management, protecting existing users, preventing illegal use, determining surface and groundwater water availability and other management activities. .

POP 102 Groundwater Data, Management and Protection: Conducting groundwater investigations is a priority recommended action in the state's 2017 Integrated Water Resources Strategy. The importance of, and need for, these groundwater studies was highlighted in the Oregonian's series "Draining Oregon". The state has nineteen river basins, but to date, only three WRD/USGS groundwater investigations have been completed (Deschutes, Upper Klamath and Willamette). Another is currently underway in the Malheur Basin (Harney County). The OWRD has twelve basins they have identified as priorities for basin studies, which with the current funding in their base budget would take 60 years to complete. As more and more people turn to groundwater to meet new demands, these groundwater investigations provide invaluable information that is critical to sound management and sustainable uses of our state's water resources. Without these studies we are likely to see problems such as those faced in the Umatilla and Harney Basins multiply over time.

POP 106 Enhanced Water Management in the Field: Water masters provide critical field presence needed for effective water management statewide. We cannot stress enough the importance of these positions to both water right holders and the protection of the broader public interest. However, despite increasing conflicts over water, complex water management agreements/laws and an ever increasing load of water rights to manage (over 89,000 water rights statewide), the state's watermaster pool has dropped over the years. The Integrated Water Resources Strategy identifies the need to rebuild field capacity. Investing in these positions should be a top priority for this state. Additionally, Package 106 bolsters the hydrotech team. Data collected by hydrologic technicians is critical to management of Oregon's water resources to protect instream and out-of-stream water rights, determine water availability, forecast floods and other management functions.

POP 103 Resolving Complex Water Issues: The OWRD is increasingly being relied upon to address complex water issues in basins around the state. OWRD expertise is necessary to these conversations, but participating in these forums takes a significant amount of staff resources. With climate change and increasing incidents of drought, the need for OWRD staff/expertise in these areas will only heighten.

## **II. OWRD reduction options:**

Support: We support the GRB's proposed cut of general funds for feasibility studies—given the limited General Fund monies that that OWRD receives, we feel strongly that General Funds should be targeted at OWRD Packages that provide benefits to all Oregonian's, not feasibility studies for private projects that may or may not provide any public benefits.

Conclusion: In making the final decision as to what programs will be funded, we respectfully request that the Committee fund the OWRD base budget and then prioritize key water management, science, and field service packages that will help serve the broader public interest in protecting and managing Oregon's Water Resources.

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