



**OREGON WATER UTILITY COUNCIL**  
Pacific Northwest Section, American Water Works Association

PNWS-AWWA



**CENTRAL OREGON CITIES ORGANIZATION**  
BEND, CULVER, LA PINE, MADRAS, MAUPIN  
METOLIUS, PRINEVILLE, REDMOND, SISTERS



## **Funding Request for OWRD Complex Water Basin Coordination – Deschutes and Willamette Basins**

On behalf of the League of Oregon Cities, Central Oregon Cities Organization, the Oregon Water Utility Council, the Special Districts Association of Oregon, and the Deschutes Basin Board of Control (8 Central Oregon Irrigation Districts) we are writing to request funding for Policy Option Package 103 that was included in the Oregon Water Resources Department's (OWRD) 2019-21 Agency Request Budget but was not included in the Governor's recommended budget.

This funding will specifically help advance efforts to resolve complex water management issues and provide needed support to advance water supply solutions in the Willamette and Deschutes basins.

**Policy Option Package (POP) 103** would allocate one basin coordinator for each basin (Natural Resource Specialist 5 – Basin Coordinator – 0.88 FTE - \$204,003 (2019-21) - \$231,286 (2021-23)). The total funds required to staff the two positions for the biennium are \$870,578 (general fund). In addition, POP 103 included \$750,000 in general funds to provide contract funds that will be necessary to engage facilitators and experts that will be required to engage stakeholders and implement local solutions.

**Willamette Basin:** The state and federal government have invested significant time and resources, stemming over many years, to complete the Willamette Basin Review Study. The goal of the study is to allocate the storage space in the Willamette Basin projects (13 reservoirs storing up to 1.64 million acre-feet of water) for Endangered Species Act-listed fish (F&W), agricultural irrigation (AI) and municipal and industrial water supply (M&I). After 3 years of study (50 percent of which was funded through OWRD's Water Supply Development Fund), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced its Agency Recommended Plan (ARP) in September 2018 that proposes specific allocations of storage space to meet the variety of needs in the basin.

Implementation of the study will require considerable involvement of OWRD - the state will need to navigate significant complexities in water law, water management and stakeholder engagement in order to be successful. Unfortunately, OWRD does not have staff resources to dedicate to the effort – an effort that epitomizes the state’s commitment to integrated water resources strategies. Done right, the allocation of the storage space will provide for significant economic benefit to growing communities in the state’s most populated basin. Failure to provide adequate attention to this process could result in litigation for the state and a missed opportunity to secure future water supply for listed fish species, agriculture and municipal use.

**Deschutes Basin:** More than 100 years ago, federal and state policies encouraged the settlement of central Oregon’s high desert by facilitating access to land and irrigation water. This water helped support the diverse agriculture that has helped shape the region. However, a result of this water development was that many rivers and streams were left with low or altered flows. As the region grew, the Upper Deschutes River basin experienced increased demand for water for people, cities, farms, and fish and wildlife. Over the past two decades, irrigation districts, governmental entities, and conservation groups have worked together to address these issues. Throughout this collaboration, basin stakeholders were actively partnering to implement water conservation and water marketing projects that restored significant flows to basin rivers and streams and that aided groundwater uses (by establishing groundwater mitigation).

As a “capstone” to previous studies conducted in the basin, the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation and the Basin Study Work Group recently completed a 3-year study - The Upper Deschutes River Basin Study. The \$1.5 million study was funded on a 50/50 cost-share basis by Reclamation’s WaterSMART Program and OWRD’s Water Supply Development Fund. A major outcome of the study was to assess current and future water supply and demand in the Upper Deschutes River Basin and to identify a range of potential strategies to address projected water supply imbalances. Of course, implementing the identified strategies requires resolving numerous water law and water management issues and ongoing engagement with basin stakeholders. Currently OWRD does not have the staff resources to provide the needed on-going support to this critical basin.

These two basins need dedicated staffing to help them move from detailed planning efforts funded by federal, state and local funds into actual implementation of on-the-ground solutions. Navigating the implementation of solutions that can impact a variety of local stakeholders with varying, and sometimes competing needs, requires consistent time and attention. Without the appropriate staff to focus on these complex water issues, communities can, and in the past have become frustrated and less inclined to continue to spend time and invest resources into working to implement local solutions to complex basin issues.

We are seeking your support to fund Basin Coordinators in the Willamette and Deschutes basins as an on-going commitment to OWRD’s Integrated Water Resources Strategy and to promote economic well-being in these two important basins.