



WEST MULTNOMAH
Soil & Water Conservation District

March 18, 2019

The Honorable Kathleen Taylor, Co-Chair
The Honorable Jeff Reardon, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means - Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources
900 Court Street NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Re: Public Testimony In Support of SB 5539 and SB 5540

Dear Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon and Members of the Joint Subcommittee:

I am writing to support passage of Senate Bills 5539 and 5540 relating to the financial administration of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), and also in support of all the Policy Option Packages for OWEB as recommended in the Governor's budget. Specifically, I provide information covering 3 areas of OWEB's budget: (1) funding for the Oregon Agricultural Water Quality Management Program, (2) funding for OWEB's Local Small Grant Program, and (3) funding contained within Policy Option Package #210 relating to Forest Collaborative grants.

First, let me introduce you to Oregon's Conservation Partnership – the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils, the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts and the Oregon Conservation Education and Assistance Network – a group of statewide organizations that represent the many local entities – watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts and land trusts – involved in providing direct technical and financial conservation assistance to primarily private entities– be it farms, forests, ranches, residents, neighborhoods, community groups, businesses and schools. We are a network of dedicated natural resource professionals – boots on the ground -- that work under the auspices of volunteer Boards so we can achieve conservation outcomes for healthy soil, clean water and diverse habitat; just about anywhere within the State of Oregon. I work for the West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District, which covers Multnomah County west of the Willamette River, all of Sauvie Island including the Columbia County portion of the Island and a small area within Washington County's Bonny Slope region of the north Tualatin Mountains.

Section 4b of Article XV of Oregon's Constitution specifies the use of proceeds from the State Lottery for salmon restoration, watershed health and wildlife habitat conservation including projects to protect or restore native fish or wildlife habitats; protect or restore natural watershed functions to improve water quality or stream flows; and most importantly, carrying out resource assessments; planning, design and engineering, technical assistance, monitoring and outreach activities. The Oregon Conservation Partnership lives and breathes this work daily. We are on a first name basis with the OWEB and each of us is regularly touched by OWEB's technical and

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administrative capacity, and of course funding. In summary, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is a key enabler of our work.

Oregon Agriculture Water Quality Management Program

Funding for the Oregon Agriculture Water Quality Management Program is very important to soil and water conservation districts throughout the state. This funding provides each district with base operating funds so we can meet our responsibilities in implementing the Oregon Agriculture Water Quality Management Program. Essentially, our role is to provide technical and financial assistance so that agricultural operations meet Oregon's water quality standards for non-point source pollution. It is a pro-active approach to preventing water pollution because our job is to keep agricultural producers from getting out of compliance by walking the operation, writing a property specific conservation plan and affirming or recommending best practices. Should funding be available, we can offer financial assistance to help agricultural producers implement the recommended practices. And it is all voluntary.

Part of our responsibilities is also to support the development of Agriculture Water Quality Management Area Plans – which look at issues and conditions in a defined geographic region – in our case the North Coast (Sauvie Island) and the Lower Willamette Water Quality Management Areas – so that problems are identified and priorities set. This is done through a Local Advisory Committee for each Water Quality Management Area consisting of farmers, ranchers, community leaders and other interest parties and supported by both the local soil and water conservation district and the Oregon Department of Agriculture. A unique aspect of the program is our ability to identify “Focus Areas” – in our case the Sauvie Island Soil Health Focus Area. Since 2015, we have written 13 conservation plans covering 558 acres of farmland and implemented soil building practices on 48.5 acres. When landowners are gathered under the auspices of a focus area, they interact with one another. It has been particularly rewarding to watch the interaction between the organic, often smaller acreage farmers interact and talk shop with the “conventional”, large acreage landowners on the Island. We have seen firsthand larger farmers go from not seeing how they could possibly incorporate cover crops into their rotations to plantings 10-20 acres a year. And the cover crops not only prevent surface erosion of farmland during winter storm events, they improve the productivity of the farmland itself.

OWEB Local Small Grant Program

OWEB's Local Small Grant Program is a great example of the State providing local resources to local entities for local projects. The West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District currently chairs the Lower Willamette West local grant committee. These funds – awarded in amounts up to \$15,000 per project -- are made available to both watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts for on-the-ground restoration projects. Here is an example provided to me from West Multnomah's rural conservationist, Scott Gall:

“In 2012, we began helping a cemetery with more than 50 acres of natural area begin to restore streamside forest habitat. All 50 acres were infested with invasive non-native ivy, holly, *Clematis*, and blackberry. We began in a 14 acre corridor with a somewhat limited budget. We did a very average job of controlling weeds and were left with a small planting budget. Both the district and the cemetery pitched in over \$8,000 each, yet the budget was

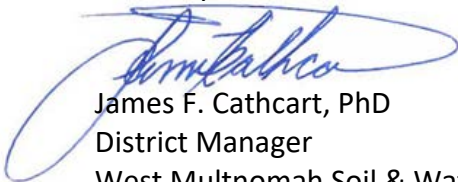
depleted and our planting numbers were smaller than they should have been and an important maintenance treatment of weeds was not performed. Using our lessons learned, we went after the project again. With funds from an OWEB local small grant, as well as the cemetery and the district, we began the project with a much healthier budget of more than \$20,000 (nearly \$9,000 of which was from OWEB) and tightened our planting spacing to 6 feet by 6 feet. This enabled us to plant more than 17,000 plants and treat the invasive weeds on 3 separate occasions. The site still looks great, and the weeds have been kept under control.”

In addition to the nice on-the-ground outcome, the example illustrates that these small grants make a big difference in providing the resources for a local project to succeed. Other more recent examples of OWEB Local Small Grants projects in our district is supplementing the cost of oak habitat restoration on Sauvie Island, coordinating a group of residents along a Tryon Creek tributary in southwest Portland to do coordinated invasive species removal and native streamside plant restoration so as to ensure a greater streamside impact, and providing funds for the placement of large wood in the main stem of Tryon Creek. And, I am happy to report, the Lower Willamette West team allocates all the monies provided and in some years our demand for project grants exceeds the amount of funds available.

OWEB Forest Collaborative Grants

The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board is the recognized leader among state natural resource agencies in developing partnerships, building capacity and championing local organizations and other non-governmental entities. Oregon’s success with watershed councils in gathering local interests around watershed health is no accident. Therefore, it comes as no surprise to me that the Oregon Department of Forestry enlisted the help of OWEB in implementing Oregon’s Federal Forest Health Program – aka Forest Collaboratives. There are over 25 forest collaboratives – all focused on securing social agreement amongst otherwise disparate interests – so action can be taken in our National Forests and surrounding lands so they are resilient to wildfire and anchor watershed health. The grant program allows a collaborative to secure funds to address a particularly tough issue or pinch point – hire a facilitator and/or cover the cost of bringing in technical expertise or covering the cost of outreach – such that the issue can be worked through. The process is to get the parties to reach a “Zone of Agreement” and then work together to make it so. Just another example about how OWEB enables on-the-ground conservation results.

Sincerely,



James F. Cathcart, PhD
District Manager

West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District

cc: M. Loftsgaarden, Director, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
P. Daugherty, State Forester, Oregon Department of Forestry
Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District Board of Directors