



Oregon Association of  
Conservation Districts

March 18, 2019

To: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
[jwmnr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov](mailto:jwmnr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov)

From: The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: Strong Support for SB 5539 and SB 5540, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)

To Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon and members of the Subcommittee on Natural Resources,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 5539 and SB 5540. I am testifying on behalf of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts to express strong support for SB 5539 and SB 5540. OACD serves and represents Oregon's 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, which are special districts governed by elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and habitat by supporting voluntary conservation in partnership with private landowners and managers as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners like the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB). SB 5539 and SB 5540 provide funding for OWEB to protect and enhance healthy, resilient watersheds and habitats for future generations.

OWEB plays a critical and unique role in our state as one of the primary agencies dedicated to protecting, restoring, and improving clean water and fish and wildlife habitat through a wide range of programs that benefit all Oregonians. Oregon leads the nation partnership-based conservation that benefits not only our fish and wildlife, but also communities across the state. OWEB relies on a strong network of local conservation organizations, such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, to identify opportunities and partner with landowners to restore riparian areas, improve water quality and monitor ecological outcomes over time. The agency's grant program is unique in the nation because it supports conservation organizations that work from the ground up to achieve statewide goals included in the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds and the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

Last biennium, SWCDs invested OWEB grants in assisting nearly 9,000 landowners and managers in voluntary conservation projects that best meet the needs and goals of the landowner and the local community. These grants have also helped leverage other sources of funding and assistance. In Eastern Oregon, OWEB's support resulted in a no-list decision for sage grouse by the USFWS while keeping farmers and ranchers in business, and is

crucial to fire recovery efforts. In Western Oregon, OWEB has supported the restoration of oak savannah and woodland habitat, 80% of which is found on private lands. Across the state, OWEB has supported Districts in controlling invasive species that threaten habitat, water quality and quantity, the economy, and even human health.

In these natural resource goals and many others, OWEB's grant program has demonstrated results on the ground. The Agency has made it possible for Oregon to address larger landscapes and more complex issues than we were able to 20 years ago. We value this ability more and more as we see the increasing complexity of natural resource challenges with increasing droughts, fires, invasive species, and extreme weather events.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB 5539 and SB 5540 and the importance of investing in conserving our soil quality, water quality and quantity, wildlife and habitat through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. OACD stands with our partners at the Network of Oregon Watershed Councils (NOWC), Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT), and Oregon Conservation and Education Assistance Network (OCEAN) in encouraging you to pass SB 5539 and SB 5540.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Freitas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and "F".

Anna H. Freitas  
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