



**WaterWatch of Oregon**  
**Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers**

**HCR 33**

**Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon**  
**Kimberley Priestley**

**House Committee on Rules**  
**May 1, 2019**

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.

**Governor Brown's Water Vision**

In the summer of 2018 Governor Brown embraced water as one of her environmental priorities. With the drafting of a 100 year water vision in the works, she committed to working to meet the needs not only of farms and cities, but of rivers and fish as well. As part of this, Governor Brown has pledged to ensure clean and abundant water for Oregon's people, economy and environment, now and for future generations. Under this vision, fish and wildlife will have access to the cool, clean water they need to thrive, including a concrete pledge to ensure that instream flows for fish and wildlife are protected and restored.

The development of the Governor's water vision is a multi-year effort that has a goal of ensuring a secure and resilient water future for the next one hundred years. In the near term this means that the Governor is working with state agencies to inventory current conditions, perform a needs assessment, conduct initial gap assessments, and set prioritization goals. For farms and cities much of this work has been done, but fish and rivers have not been so lucky.

To equalize this disparity, the number one priority for the state in the immediate future should be to fund critical work by natural resource agencies to ensure that that Oregon's environment has equal footing in these discussions, including the discussions contemplated by HCR 33. Top near term priorities should include funding of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's POP 123 to collect instream flow data necessary for the first step of the Governor's water vision (see attached letter of support), and funding of the Oregon Department of Water Resources Groundwater study work found in POP 102. Only by taking this first step will Oregon guarantee that when the state brings forth future funding and policy requests that fish and rivers will have an equal seat at the table.

As to the long view, HCR 33 can lend to the Governor's building of a secure and resilient water future for all Oregonians if key commitments are adhered to.

First and foremost, the discussions must be inclusive and transparent, and engage a broad spectrum of interests, including farmers, tribes, cities and strong environmental advocates. If the state truly wants a sustainable water future, this piece is critical.

Second, there must be a real commitment to addressing instream needs, including flows for fish and wildlife. While most stakeholders extol the importance of fish and wildlife to Oregon's economy, culture and way of life; real commitment to advancing instream goals in the halls of Salem is rare. We hope the Governor's commitment and the work under HCR 33 will change this.

And third, as noted in HCR 33, the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRS) should serve as a jumping off point for this discussion. We don't need to reinvent this wheel. The IWRS is resplendent with directives on conservation and efficiency, protecting and restoring instream flows, upgrading water infrastructure, improving water management, ensuring public safety and planning for climate change resiliency. Also, importantly, the IWRS puts a heavy emphasis on the need for data; data on fish and wildlife needs, groundwater resources, water use, climate change, water quality and instream and out-of-stream demand forecasts, among other things. This should not be lost in the HCR 33 discussions; funding for data, as well as funding the agencies responsible for much of this work (ODFW, OWRD, and DEQ), is key to a resilient water future.

Finally, we would also encourage the state to move away from the word "infrastructure" as a shortcut to framing the discussion. The word "infrastructure" advances built infrastructure over ecosystems. Even when the word is qualified as "natural and built", there is widespread confusion as to what "natural" infrastructure means. This leaves instream values at risk. The Governor's vision is expansive, and very clearly includes instream ecosystems (i.e. flows). We need to re-brand this discussion to more clearly advance the Governor's stated vision.

**Conclusion:** We are very supportive of the Governor's efforts to develop a 100 year water vision for Oregon to meet our state's instream and out-of-stream water needs. To achieve a vision that will set a resilient water future for people and ecosystems alike, the process must be transparent, include a real commitment to meeting instream needs, and include the many diverse stakeholders who have been working towards this day for decades.

We urge support of HCR 33.

Contact:

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March 12, 2019

Senator Taylor and Representative Reardon, Co-Chairs  
 Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
 900 Court Street NE  
 Salem, OR 97301

RE: **Support of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife POP 123** (\$714,600 GF, \$65,400 OF)  
 Water Quality/Water Quantity Program, 2019-2021 Budget

Dear Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon, and members of the Committee:

The undersigned groups, who represent tens of thousands of Oregonians from all parts of the state, respectfully request that the Legislature fund ODFW’s POP 123 (ARB \$714,600 GF, \$65,400 OF). In terms of securing a sustainable water future for Oregon, recovering imperiled salmon and ensuring the health of Oregon’s rivers, there simply is no more important element in this budget. It is not possible to overstate the importance of this relatively small investment for Oregon. POP 123 is the vehicle to ensuring that there is capacity for Oregon to meet many of the instream elements of the State’s Integrated Water Resources Strategy (Strategy), a consensus blueprint for the future of Oregon’s economically important waters, rivers and fisheries.

ODFW’s Water Program plays a vital role in protecting water in our state’s iconic rivers. Whether it’s securing new instream water rights to legally protect streamflows, prioritizing streamflow restoration efforts statewide, working in basin collaborative groups, or helping set water policy, ODFW’s Water Program works to protect water in our streams – and provides an invaluable service to all Oregonians.

Funding POP 123 will allow ODFW to conduct instream demand forecasts needed to plan for climate change resiliency, implement the many instream action items identified in the state's Integrated Water Resources Strategy (including Place Based Planning) and work with landowners on instream flow restoration and mitigation projects. Funding of POP 123 is essential for the effective stewardship of Oregon's fish, wildlife and their habitats.

In closing, we respectfully ask for funding of POP 123 as requested in the Agency Recommended Budget (ARB \$714,600 GF, \$65,400 OF). While we understand Oregon's current budget challenges, funding of POP 123 is critical to Oregon's water future and the future health and sustainability of Oregon's rivers, fisheries and economy.

Sincerely,

Noah Greenwald, Endangered Species Director  
Center for Biological Diversity

Paige Spence, OR Conservation Network Director  
Oregon League of Conservation Voters

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Oregon Environmental Council