



OREGON
ASSOCIATION OF
NURSERIES

**Testimony before the House Energy and Environment Committee
Relating to funding for groundwater studies
House Bill 2856**

By Jeff Stone, Executive Director
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Chair Helm, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Schouten, members of the committee, my name is Jeff Stone and I serve as the Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the issue of funding groundwater studies.

The nursery and greenhouse industry support reasoned legislation to enhance and understand issues surrounding critical resources such as water.

The Economic Footprint of the Nursery and Greenhouse Industry

The nursery and greenhouse industry is the state's largest agricultural sector, and the industry ranks third in the nation, with over \$948 million in sales annually to customers in Oregon, the rest of the United States, and abroad. In fact, nearly 75% of the nursery stock grown in our state leaves our borders – with over half reaching markets east of the Mississippi River. The nursery industry employs over 22,000 full time workers with an annual payroll over \$327 million. We send ecologically friendly green products out of the state and bring traded sector dollars back to Oregon.

Nursery association members represent wholesale plant growers, Christmas tree growers, retailers, and greenhouse operators. Our members are located throughout the state, with our largest nursery growing operations found in Clackamas, Marion, Washington, Yamhill and Multnomah Counties.

To manage water resources, we must have data

Water is the lifeblood of the nursery and greenhouse industry. It must be available for use in sufficient quantity and quality to allow for future growth of the industry. However, the management of water is only as good as the information the state has at its disposal. Therefore, the OAN and other moderate water stakeholders do not believe that the current budget submitted by the Water Resources Department (WRD) is adequate – not only for this budget cycle but for the upcoming years.

The WRD Integrated Water Resources Strategy and the Water Resources Department Strategic Plan calls out for the need to better understand both surface and groundwater resources. We appreciate WRD Director Tom Byler submitting a plan for a Systems Approach for Expediting Groundwater Basin Studies. Many of the elements laid out in the plan make sense – however a 60-year horizon to complete studies in 12 basins of concern is too long and has potential economic consequences.

The OAN believes that the current conjunctive management approach to groundwater and surface water supplies (Division 9) in the Willamette Valley is stifling economic development. We need to develop a more rational approach to this issue, including robust mitigation options and greater understanding of the groundwater resource – including data relating to groundwater.

House Bill 2856 is aggressive and holds WRD accountable

It is our firm belief that the Water Resources Department must undergo a multi-year plan to secure data for groundwater throughout the state than spans the next five biennia. This requires significant resources and accountability. There must be a shared commitment by the department and the legislature to invest in the data that is needed to manage a delicate water resource.

House Bill 2856 allocates \$9 million for the first phase of the groundwater study effort. The OAN believes that the WRD must develop a ten-year plan that prioritizes groundwater studies throughout the state and present to the legislature with additional details regarding legislative investment needed to implement completion of the effort. During the odd-numbered legislative session, the WRD is compelled to provide the legislature with a biennial report on how the funds appropriated under this bill have been spent.

Understanding the resource is critical to Oregon

We appreciate the balancing act the legislature must undergo to balance the budget and provide adequate resources for natural resource agency to complete their core missions. The ability for the WRD to conduct basin studies to understand groundwater resources and how they interact with surface water in each basin has both economic and ecological impacts. The proper use of groundwater data allows the department to better manage water as a resource.

The nursery and greenhouse industry will continue to be a strong advocate for focused and reasoned investments into water resources and urge the committee to support HB 2856. Thank you for your time and consideration