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TO: The Honorable Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Water

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SUBJECT: HB 3093 Declares harmful algal blooms (HABs) to be a menace to public health and welfare and directs Oregon Health Authority and Department of Environmental Quality to develop and maintain a monitoring and response strategy to identify, monitor and assess water sources susceptible to freshwater harmful algal blooms.

Chair Helm and Vice-Chairs Owens and Reardon, and members of the committee; my name is André Ourso, and I am the Administrator of the Center for Health Protection with the Oregon Health Authority. OHA has no position on the bill, but I can provide technical information about the effects of freshwater harmful algal blooms on water sources in Oregon, their negative effects on public health and welfare, and the potential impact of HB 3093.

Bill Summary

This bill requires Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to coordinate the development and maintenance of a monitoring and response strategy for the identification, monitoring and assessment of water sources susceptible to freshwater HABs. The agencies are required to prioritize monitoring of water sources, develop protocols for alerting the public about freshwater HAB events and produce and maintain timely, high-quality and publically accessible data. Agencies are required to support studies on the risk of harm to water bodies and public health from freshwater HABs, including long- and short-term effects of wildfire. Agencies are also required to support education and outreach on freshwater HABs to the public and develop and distribute plans, tools and training to all stakeholders involved in freshwater HAB mitigation to appropriately respond to these HABs.

Issue

Freshwater HABs are an increasing menace to water quality and to public health and welfare across the state. Freshwater HABs have affected domestic and municipal

drinking water sources and recreational waters; freshwater HABs are increasing in intensity and length because of the effects of human activity and climate change. Increased freshwater HABs render water sources susceptible to potential toxins that can cause illness in people, particularly children, and are documented to have killed dogs and other domestic animals in Oregon. In addition to the water quality and health consequences of freshwater HABs, these events can negatively impact the economies of economically distressed communities near water sources affected by these HABs.

Impact

The requirements of HB 3093 will develop additional protections to Oregonians from freshwater HABs. Being able to develop a coordinated monitoring and assessment program to identify HABs events and susceptible water bodies will help reduce the effects of HABs on water sources used for domestic and municipal drinking water and recreation. Systematic testing of hazardous water bodies and identification of the pollution sources contributing to freshwater HABs will provide an opportunity to address these HABs and toxins through effective reduction strategies and stewardship activities. Reducing pollutant contribution will help reduce the occurrence and impacts to the public, economy and environment caused by freshwater HABs. The addition of coordinated planning and communication strategies across agencies to the bill enhances resources, prevents workload overlap, builds a framework for freshwater HABs monitoring, response, and mitigation, and develops consistency in messaging.

Health system impacts from freshwater HAB events

An enhanced HABs alert system and a reduction in freshwater HABs and associated toxins will reduce human and animal exposure. A reduction in exposure and the symptoms caused by the HABs related toxins will reduce the number of visits to the doctor and, for pets, to the veterinarian.

Equity

Most domestic systems (private intakes and in-home water treatment) used by individuals in economically disadvantaged communities have very few options available to them to reduce or eliminate toxins present from water bodies with freshwater HAB events. The residential filtration systems that can reduce HABs are expensive and often difficult to find. Alternative drinking water sources such as bottled water or trucking in domestic water could be cost prohibitive for low-income communities and households. Small municipal systems in many communities affected by freshwater HABs lack resources and must apply for project loans through OHA's Drinking Water Services program to upgrade treatment and plant capacity, especially if add-on treatment is needed for issues like taste and odor problems that can be associated with these HAB events. Of the loans OHA has provided to municipal systems from 2009 through 2020,

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47 of the 227, or approximately 21% of the projects that received funding were considered disadvantaged or economically distressed and received better financing terms, rates and loan incentives. Although these treatment project loans were not made specifically to help mitigate freshwater HABs, some of the improvements made may assist with reducing the issues associated with these HAB events.

In Oregon, many water sources used for recreation are associated with disproportionately impacted communities because they are located in areas of the state where the health of the economy is directly proportional to the health of the water resource. In addition to the economic impacts, many of these recreational resources are the only outlet for individuals who cannot afford to recreate in other ways. According to a 2018 American Community Survey conducted by Business Oregon, of the 241 Oregon cities surveyed, 205 of those cities were considered economically distressed.

It is difficult to quantify the exact impacts of freshwater HAB events on businesses based on available information, however, the Forest Service has informed OHA over past years that vendors in small rural communities and businesses operating on National Forest Service lands who depend on the recreational water resource for their livelihood experience severe adverse economic impacts when freshwater HABs occur and health advisories are issued.

Implementation of the requirements of HB 3093 will assist in reducing exposures to freshwater HABs and, over time, could help reduce the potential for freshwater HAB events to occur. This will in turn reduce human and animal exposures and the economic burden associated with reduced recreation and tourism in economically disadvantaged communities.

I am available as a resource to the committee if there are any questions or concerns. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.