

March 24, 2021

Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony on HB 5037 & HB 5038: Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board Budget

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Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 5037 and HB 5038, the budget for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) for the 2021-23 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

TNC works closely with OWEB on a wide variety of conservation issues, from sage grouse habitat restoration, to tide gates, to groundwater scarcity in the Harney Basin. Despite historic obstacles, OWEB has managed gracefully through difficult and volatile budget challenges during this current biennium. As we head forward to more stable times, we advocate that the agency's operating capacity be restored, and respectfully ask that the following funding be included in the 2021-23 biennial budget:

#### **Restore OWEB's Base Budget**

First and foremost, we advocate for the restoration of the agency's base budget, including contract services. The reductions proposed in the Governor's Recommended Budget could impede OWEB from maintaining programs that protect watersheds and native fish and wildlife habitats. Though lottery funds took extreme hits last year due to COVID shut-downs, we note that the most recent forecast again predicts the return to typical stability for this funding source, and therefore in the 2021-23 biennium the agency should be allowed to return its operating capacity to a level where base programs can effectively deliver OWEB's mission.

#### **In addition, we support the following investments as included in the GRB:**

- **POP 110: Water and climate** – This funding would support the work of the 100-year Water Vision while enhancing capacity to add critical focus to the intersection between climate and water.
- **POP 120: Tide Gate Coordinator** – Tide gate repair and replacement projects provide a critical opportunity to support people and nature in sensitive ecosystems along the coast, and this staffing capacity will help leverage ongoing efforts and partnerships in these delicate habitats.
- **POP 230: Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program** – We appreciate the Governor's support of the agency seeking outside funding for this valuable program during a time where state allocations are limited, and ask you to retain this opportunity.

**Finally, we ask for inclusion of POP 100: Staffing (not funded in the GRB):**

This investment would continue important staffing positions that contribute to conservation goals by tracking and communicating M76 investment outcomes, and supporting regional Focused Investment Partnerships that enable large landscape restoration initiatives.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on Oregon's critical Natural Resource funding priorities.