



The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 101-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

March 31, 2021

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Sen. Kathleen Taylor and Rep. Jeff Reardon, Co-Chairs
Members of the Subcommittee

Re: **SB 5539** – Department of State Lands Budget – **Support**

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that natural resources such as forests and the animals and plants living within them should be managed as interrelated parts of life-supporting ecosystems.

The Department of State Lands is critical to the management of many of Oregon's public assets: Not only for the Common School Fund (CSF) lands and the management of the actual Fund, but for the protection of the waters of the state.

The League has strong positions on water quality. We particularly note that Oregon has a goal of no net loss of wetlands. Oregon recognizes the role of wetlands in water quality and in flood management among other values. The waters of the state are an important public asset. Management of activities in these waters must be done carefully and with full application of state and federal regulations. **We do encourage the agency to review its removal-fill permit application fees as that work is long overdue and fees need to be increased. A 2019 study indicated that fees are only covering about 20% of the cost of processing. The League supports a shared system as we also believe the public needs to be represented in the application process.**

The Portland Harbor Cleanup effort must continue. The Portland League of Women Voters in particular has been an active commenter during the decision-making process. We are pleased that we are moving from discussions on how to clean up this important public place to actually beginning the cleanup! We look forward to when the harbor can offer the opportunity for both recreational and economic uses. We support the state's diligence in protecting the state's liability and **we support the department's request (POPs 101 and 102)** for continuing this important work.

The League has been a longtime supporter of the South Slough Reserve, an incredible special place for research, for educational opportunities and for recreation. We support the ongoing efforts to maintain this asset and encourage the department to seek further federal funding to expand the reserve as willing sellers appear, to continue repairs as needed and continue to work with the local tribes nearby. As mentioned by the Director, this special asset is also helping us better understand **the effects of climate change** on our many state estuaries—in fact, estuaries all along the West Coast. This session **we support continuation of the federal fund grants in POPs 111 and 112, as well as SB 126 that recognizes the reserve's approved and expanded boundary.**

The League would also like to draw the committee's attention to **HB 3114, a bill that would provide funding for the Oregon Ocean Science Trust (OOST),** an entity under this agency. We have supported this group since its inception in 2013 and have asked for funding for their science work and for the work of other groups working on ocean acidification. We hope this bill will come before you this session and you can consider the importance of funding this work.

The League engaged in the discussions around the Elliott State Forest for the past few years. We respect that balancing the requirement to provide monies to the Common School Fund, while managing a variety of state lands is a continuing challenge. On December 9, 2014, the League provided testimony to the Department related to the Elliott State Forest, in part: "*LWVOR acknowledges that this is a very difficult issue because of an outdated arrangement that*

couples a pristine forest ecosystem to school funding. Our schools and protection of our forests are both important and one should not have to be chosen at the expense of the other.” We continue to support Governor Brown’s efforts to find a final public ownership solution. We appreciated the legislature’s action in 2017 to begin to protect the Elliott’s environmental assets including the remaining native forests, the old growth forests that are disappearing from our landscape, protecting the wild salmon and imperiled wildlife and safeguarding the Elliott for public recreational and educational opportunities. **We support the agency’s working toward a Habitat Conservation Plan to be able to provide timber jobs by restoratively thinning the second-growth tree farms which are a part of the Elliott while also protecting endangered species who live there. We support POP 108 to continue moving forward on the Elliott.** The Elliott State Research Forest Advisory Committee, established among the various interests, continues to meet; its next meeting is April 22.

We believe that the other forest lands and massive acres of rangeland provide diversity in the Common School Fund’s portfolio. The stock market has been a friendly vehicle these past few years, but that has not always been the case. **In the early 2000s and again in 2009 the fund experienced a loss—each loss much greater than the 3 years of timber proceeds lost on the Elliott.**

We support POP 105 that converts 6 FTE from limited duration to permanent positions. The positions include a forester, an ownership specialist, wetlands land use notice reviewer, a rules coordinator (needed if they move forward with updating their fees), a policy analyst and communications person.

We support the agency’s efforts to turn the recently acquired lands in Central Oregon into profitable Common School Fund assets by either selling or entering into development contracts for these lands. The adopted Master Plan should guide the department. **We will follow HB 2282, a bill that would sell another portion of CSF land near Bend, but we want both a fair price and some guarantee that truly affordable housing will be part of any development.**

We look to the success of transferring the Trust Property Program to the State Treasury and support POPs 103 and 104 to complete that work.

Members of this committee continue to work to find solutions to cleaning up Oregon’s waterways. **We support POP 110 to provide grants for this work. But we also support SB 840 to allow counties to add a fee to boat registrations to find additional funds for this cleanup.** The cost to the public health of Oregon’s waters should not be neglected. Increased focus on this problem (over 200 boats are now abandoned in Oregon’s waters) should be part of the agency’s work this next biennium.

Lastly, but equally important is addressing the agency’s 1999 information system. **We support POPs 106 and 107 as they go through the Stage Gate process set up by this legislature to modernize their IT system and an FTE for a staffer to assure that the new system works for the agency and the public.**

As you can see, this department has a wide variety of responsibilities. Administrative leadership and staff support for their multiple missions has been impressive. We want to recognize the value of this agency to Oregon—to its children and to our natural assets. Your consideration of the various requests in this budget is appreciated.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.



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