



The Nature Conservancy in Oregon  
821 SE 14th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97214-2537

tel 503 802-8100

fax 503 802-8199

[nature.org/oregon](http://nature.org/oregon)

April 12, 2021

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony on SB 5516: Department of Environmental Quality Budget

Submitted by: Amelia Porterfield, Senior Policy Advisor

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Co-Chairs Taylor and Reardon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 5516, the budget for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) 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.

Oregonians treasure our clean air, clean water, and pristine natural environment. DEQ serves a vital function in protecting these natural resources today and for future generations. The agency also plays a key role in Oregon's efforts to mitigate the effects of the climate crisis. Addressing climate change by reducing emissions, increasing carbon sequestration, and improving ecosystem and community resilience are top priorities for The Nature Conservancy in Oregon and around the world. We strongly believe that Oregonians have a responsibility to enact policies to address our contributions and enable the necessary responses to climate change. With that frame in mind, we encourage you to prioritize the following funding options as you consider the budget for this agency.

**Support Policy Option Packages included in the Governor's Recommended Budget:**

- **POP 111: Climate Protection Program**

We support the continuation of agency funding for the development of a strong and rigorous Climate Protection Program to cap and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that meets the 2035 and 2050 reductions targets in Governor Brown's Executive Order 20-04. The \$2 million provided in this package will ensure the agency can maintain its current efforts, meet its IT infrastructure needs and complete successful program development. These dollars would also ensure robust community engagement as the Climate Protection Plan is developed and implemented.

- **POP 90: Environmental Justice Office**

This package adds three new positions, funds data analysis to address environmental burdens in impacted communities and supports the development of a science-based vulnerability mapping tool that would identify environmental health burdens on frontline communities. This would help agencies to avoid adverse environmental health impacts in policy development and program implementation.

**Restore Funding for Water Quality (002), Position to support Integrated Water Resources Strategy:**

We urge the Legislature to retain \$286,768 in funding for this position that supports DEQ's participation in Oregon's Integrated Water Resource Strategy. This position reviews water right permits, develops conditions for ensuring high water quality standards, provides oversight and support for water Supply Development Fund Grants, and improves coordination with the Oregon Department of Forestry and Wildlife and Oregon Water Resources.

Notably, this position also provides aid for Place-Based Planning, which The Nature Conservancy strongly supports as a method of water management that directly addresses ecological priorities and impacts to frontline communities. In 2017, the Oregon Water Resources Commission updated the State's Integrated Water Resources Strategy, which asserts that "conducting groundwater investigations is a priority for the state." Place-Based Planning achieves this aim by assessing current hydrologic conditions, water demand, and future water needs—all of which rely on state and federal monitoring wells and groundwater studies. Without adequate staffing, reliable and timely data collection will be difficult to achieve, and adequate transparency and accountability could be compromised.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to weigh in and for your thoughtful approach to crafting the DEQ Budget.