

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means

Re: SB 5555

I'm writing in support of funding for Oregon Water Resources Department and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Smart, responsible and equitable water management is one of the state's most critical environmental and economic challenges. Given a changing climate and a history of inequitable water decisions, it's critical that Oregon invest in OWRD programs driven by data, science, and smart water management.

In this regard, please reject proposed reductions to OWRD's science, management and data programs. The Governor's Recommended Budget (Reduction Packages 090 and 092) would eliminate an assistant watermaster, a groundwater hydrogeologist, gaging stations and observation wells, and potentially eliminate other positions that could derail long needed groundwater study work.

Please support science to understand Oregon's aquifers and groundwaters. (Policy Option Package 110). In a climate-changed Oregon, this is absolutely critical. Today, the state makes permanent groundwater decisions without data across most of Oregon! This approach resulted in "train wrecks" in basins like the Umatilla and Harney. Please fund POP 110, which will help the state gather data to make more sustainable groundwater decisions for Oregon's water future.

Please fund "boots on the ground" water management (Policy Option Package 109). Oregon desperately needs more water management capacity; thus, water management largely is complaint driven. This is unacceptable. Field staff are critical for on-the-ground water management across the state. OWRD capacity is far below needed sustainable management for instream and out-of-stream rights.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife: Oregon's future must include adequate water for abundant salmon populations. Please provide funding to protect fish and wildlife in regional water discussions (Policy Option Package 114). Recent planning efforts under the Integrated Water Resources Strategy require basin specific Placed-Based Planning to meet instream and out-of-stream needs. Yet, the Legislature has NOT funded ODFW to be at the table in these processes, which shortchanges rivers, fish, and wildlife. Please fund Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon Water Resources Department's work to reallocate stored water behind the Willamette Dams (ODFW Policy Option Package 115, OWRD Policy Option Package 113). Stored water behind 13 federal reservoirs in the Willamette Basin, totaling 1.6 million acre feet of water, was recently reallocated by Congress to allow municipal/industrial and fish and wildlife uses in addition to previously authorized irrigation. Implementation at the state level will take a tremendous amount of work by ODFW and OWRD. Among other things, it will be necessary to quantify and track live-flow and stored-water releases for new instream rights for fish and wildlife and out-of-stream rights for municipal and agriculture users, as well as to manage who gets access to water during times of shortage. This funding is critical for the most populous basin in the state.

Please support agency work to protect fish and other natural resources in the state's hydroelectric work: Please support efforts to update and simplify annual fees paid by hydroelectric projects in order to maintain current service levels at OWRD, ODFW and the Department of Environmental Quality. The staff positions are critical to ensuring fish, wildlife and other natural resource values are protected as required by hydro statutes (Policy Option Package 105 and House Bill 2143).

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

Peter Murray