



May 6, 2021

Audubon Society of Portland

City of Fairview

City of Gresham

City of Portland

Bureau of Environmental Services

Bureau of Transportation

Portland Parks & Recreation

Portland Water Bureau

City of Troutdale

Columbia Corridor Association

Columbia Slough Watershed Council

Metro

Multnomah County

Multnomah County Drainage District

Peninsula Drainage District #1

Peninsula Drainage District #2

Port of Portland

Joint Committee on Ways & Means, Subcommittee on Capital Construction
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: House Bill 5534 and Senate Bill 622

Co-Chairs Holvey and Girard and Members of the Committee,

Levees (also called dikes) were built across the country throughout the 20th century to help reduce the risk of flooding on lands adjacent to oceans, rivers, and streams. In Oregon, there are well over one thousand miles of levees throughout the state. These levees provide critical protection to urban and rural areas alike. This infrastructure exists everywhere from Burns to Astoria, Klamath Falls to Portland, Milton-Freewater to Eugene, and everywhere in between. Unfortunately, local jurisdictions struggle to keep up with the necessary maintenance, let alone completing the work required to bring this critical infrastructure up to the modern-day federal safety levee standards that have evolved following Hurricane Katrina and Sandy. Meeting the federal safety standards set by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides communities with many benefits including access to federal aid in the event of a flood and affordable flood insurance through FEMA's National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).

In 2015, the Oregon State Legislature recognized the importance of levee infrastructure by creating a levee-related loan fund under the Special Public Works Fund (SPWF) of Business Oregon's Infrastructure Finance Authority (IFA). Although the loan fund proved immensely helpful to the jurisdictions with the financial capacity to make debt payments, many were unable to take advantage of the funding because they are unable to meet the debt obligation, even at the IFA's modest interest rates. So, in 2019, the State Legislature created the Levee Grant Program and allocated \$15 million in lottery bond sales to the fund (HB 5030). Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State was unable to issue lottery bonds in 2020 so no funding was made available

through the program. Meanwhile, many levee projects remain incomplete, putting more residents and businesses at risk across the state.

Many communities eagerly await the opportunity to apply for grant funding so they can make critical improvements to their flood safety infrastructure. Senate Bill 622 allocates \$10 million in net proceeds from lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Fund to support the investigation, planning, and construction of levee improvement projects to identify and establish their adequacy for federal certification and accreditation.

Sadly, there are too many examples of what happens when our levees cannot withstand floodwaters. Many people know about the tragic 1948 flood that washed away the City of Vanport, killing at least 15 people and leaving another 18,000 without homes. Just one year ago, the Umatilla River overtook a levee in Pendleton, wreaking havoc on the community and damaging over 500 buildings, as well as closing parts of Interstate 84.

With grant dollars available for flood safety projects, more communities will be able to work on evaluating and improving this important public safety infrastructure. This will reduce the risk of flooding across Oregon and provide important protection to people, property, and businesses, as well as parks, open spaces, and fish and wildlife around the state.

Thank you for your previous support of levee operators and communities across Oregon. Please remember these places as you consider lottery bond authorization for the biennium and direct at least \$10 million in lottery bond sales to the Levee Grant Program. This is a much-needed resource for critical flood safety infrastructure throughout our state.

Sincerely yours,

Levee Ready Columbia partners