

**Testimony to the Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Ways and Means Committee
On HB 5018**

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Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance innovative, collaborative and equitable solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Oregon Environmental Council strongly supports HB 5018.

Oregon needs and deserves a 21st century agency to do the monitoring, testing, outreach, oversight, economic development and accountability needed to keep Oregon's people, air, water, climate and land healthy and resilient. Natural resource agencies, in total, only account for a small percentage of the state's general fund budget. Budget cuts to these agencies do not save the state much money, yet do harm to public health and negatively impact permitting. It is critical that agencies have resources to do the work necessary to keep the state moving forward.

We know what happens when agency budgets get cut to the bone. We miss trends and hot spots and the public is harmed. Oregon must meet challenges and anticipate harms before they become crises. Business also depends on resourced agencies. In the past OEC has worked with multiple stakeholders to ensure there was adequate funding for permitting, which is important to moving business forward.

We not only support what is in HB 5018, but also a number of other POPs that are reasonable investments in critical programs.

Water

With climate change-related fluctuations in precipitation patterns, where, when and how much water we'll get is uncertain, as is how much groundwater is available for withdrawals now and in the future. Ensuring that our available water resources are drinkable, swimmable and fishable is of paramount importance. While progress has been made, Oregon still has backlogs in key protective water quality permitting programs due to staff shortages. Communities reliant on groundwater for their drinking water are at risk, and surface water sources contaminated by harmful algae blooms endanger communities due to DEQ's lack of staff and programmatic support for dealing with those challenges.

Domestic well water quality tests continue to be underreported. The state needs to evaluate if our groundwater protection program is working effectively. State-level water management remains uncoordinated, and despite investments in the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, regional planning efforts can be stymied by a lack of input from capacity-constrained departments. Tools like natural infrastructure, with all its co-benefits, are underutilized in our approach to ensuring water quality because of a lack of technical assistance.

For these reasons, OEC supports the following:

- POPs 121 & 122 Supports staffing for wastewater and storm water permitting (POP 121 \$1,378,265 GF and 969,534 other funds, POP 122 \$220,732 GF, \$223,158 OF)
- POP 123 Supports staffing and implementation of regulatory oversight of on-site septic system permitting and address water pollution prevention and consequent risks to public health (\$630,375 GF, \$450,506 other funds)
- POP 125 Supports DEQ's involvement in regional, place-based planning efforts to implement the IWRS, protect against water quality impacts of climate change and provide cross-program coordination for natural infrastructure project development (\$750,523 GF)
- POP 126 Supports protecting drinking water sources, address threats from HABs, and groundwater studies in the Lower Umatilla Basin (included in GRB, \$1,063,738 GF)
- POP 127 and LC 414 Supports contracting out an evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of current groundwater quality protection efforts, based on the Groundwater Quality Protection Act (1989), and convening a subsequent Taskforce to review the evaluation and make recommendations (\$275,000 GF)
- POP 128 (currently HB 3207) Supports amending current real estate transaction reporting requirements so that data comes to DEQ

Climate

Climate change is already producing devastating impacts in Oregon, and the destruction caused by recent climate-influenced weather events and natural disasters, such as wildfires, droughts, and unprecedented heat waves, have price tags in the billions of dollars.

Ever-worsening climate impacts across the state have made clearer than ever the need to reduce emissions and protect Oregon communities on the frontline of climate impacts. Strong implementation of Oregon's cornerstone Climate Protection Program, Clean Fuels Program, Clean Truck Rules, and other DEQ programs are essential to ensuring a healthy climate future. With yet another devastating IPCC report underscoring the need for urgent climate action, the last thing the state should be doing is moving backwards, which is exactly what will happen if the legislature fails to adequately fund DEQ and its continued work to implement these cornerstone climate programs. These same programs that reduce climate pollution are also key to protecting public health and creating cleaner, cheaper, healthier energy and transportation options that will benefit Oregon jobs, families, and the economy.

We have an historic opportunity to leverage federal funding, but need agency resources to take advantage of these opportunities.

For these reasons, OEC strongly urges your support of:

- POP 114 Supports implementation of the Climate Protection Program and the Clean Fuels Program (\$1.6 million)
- POP 115 Supports the implementation of the Community Climate Investment program (\$1.5 million) GRB
- POP 112 Adds a transportation manager and aids Med./Heavy Duty vehicle charging pilot project (\$957,337)
- POP 142 Four positions related to supporting state and federal grant coordination (\$449,717)

Clean Air

Air pollution is one of the top contributors to poor health and harms our hearts, lungs, and brain development, especially for people who live and work in highly polluted areas. Protecting air quality is fundamental to DEQ's mission. Fees to run the Title V program have not been adequately adjusted despite changes in federal requirements and inflation, amongst other needs.

- POP 110 Supports implementation of Title V of the federal Clean Air Act, which regulates emissions from the largest sources of air pollution (\$3,400,000)
- We also strongly support increased funding for the state's Clean Vehicles, or EV Rebate program, which will run out of funds at the end of April.

Environmental Justice

Systemic decision-making has overburdened communities of color, low-income and Tribal communities with dangerous levels of pollution. The state must be intentional in its programing, outreach, and funding decisions to mitigate this harm and provide benefits to communities throughout Oregon.

- POP 140 Environmental Justice coordinator position (\$750,340)
- POP 113 Supports permanent positions to monitor air quality related to wildfire smoke and \$1.5 million in community grant funding

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. **We respectfully urge support for HB 5018 and the corresponding budget priorities we provided testimony on today.**