



Oregon Lakes Association
<https://www.oregonlakes.org>

3 April, 2023

Chair Ken Helm, Vice-Chair Mark Owens and Committee members
Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Topic: Support for HB 3124 Drought Relief and Water Security

Oregon Lakes Association applauds the Committee for assembling the diverse expenditures aimed at drought relief and water security. We applaud the allocation of funds towards addressing environmental and ecological degradation, and for considering in-stream priorities. We trust that the term “in-stream” is in general being thought of as including “in-lake.” Any money spent to ensure adequate instream flows will help avoid future listing of endangered fishes and other species.

1. Since OLA is closely involved in discussions concerning water issues affecting Lake Abert and the Chewaucan Watershed, **we strongly support the allocation of funds to OWRD and ODFW (item 1.8)** in support of the objectives of HB 3099-3. These funds would support the development of a water budget for the Chewaucan/Abert system, which is essential for developing fair and effective actions for saving Lake Abert from frequent desiccation.
2. **OLA also strongly supports the *Data and Analysis* section of HB 3124 objectives.** This entire field is sorely lacking and badly outdated in Oregon’s water world. We firmly believe that water use decisions must be based on a good knowledge of our water resources: how much is there?; where is it?; what are future predictions, taking into account climate change and in relation to changing demographics?, applied to surface and ground water.... ***Current knowledge in most watersheds does not allow us to answer those questions.***

Yet the bill includes many new initiatives that are not guided by hydrological data, such as massive irrigation infrastructure expenditures. Are all of these in areas that will be viable in a dryer future? We have particular concerns about any proposed water storage projects east of the Cascades because of the adverse impacts they will have on downstream aquatic ecosystems that are already being impacted by low flows caused by climate change. Furthermore, higher temperatures will cause huge water losses from reservoirs and invite CyanoHABs.

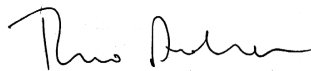
3. We thus strongly encourage the Committee not to trim any of the ***Data and Analysis*** (item #2) and ***Agency Capacity*** (part of item #1) expenditure if budgetary constraints force some cuts. The ***Data and Analysis*** expenditures are a mere ~3% of allocations being considered. We encourage a more robust follow-up in future legislative sessions.

4. **Water Resources data need to be updated more frequently:** with regard to item 2.1, OLA feels strongly that Basin Assessments and the Water Availability and Allocation Tools should be updated every ~5 years. 8-year and 16-year updates might look good against our woefully slow past work, but this time-frame is still not realistic given our rapidly changing climate and pressure of human needs. **Additional funds should be allocated to accelerate this process.**

5. **Climate understanding:** OLA strongly supports funds for the *State Climatologist (item 2.5)*. An understanding of the climate changes that are happening and will happen are enormously relevant to water use decisions. Good climate measurements are needed, especially east of the Cascades where there are few weather stations and where drought is most severe. Climate data are best obtained with a system of remotely-operated weather stations such as AGRIMET. We cannot tell whether funding for such a system is included in the HB 3124 allocations, but we have heard our current State Climatologist talk of the needs and hopes for such a system. **We strongly encourage the inclusion of funding for such a system of weather stations.**

Oregon Lakes Association is grateful for the opportunity to comment on HB 3124. We congratulate the Committee for developing such a comprehensive and needed bipartisan package of allocations, and hope that our few specific comments are helpful.

Sincerely,



Theo Dreher, President
For the OLA Board of Directors