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Joint Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development

Testimony in support of SB 5534: Public Utility Commission Budget

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Co-Chair Woods, Co-Chair Gomberg, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Senate Bill 5534, the budget for the Public Utility Commission (PUC) for the 2023-25 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy in Oregon (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization that works in communities around the state, manages lands and waters in varied ecosystems, and partners with tribes, ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature. TNC is committed to helping reach Oregon's clean energy and climate goals with least impact to nature and communities.

The PUC is an integral agency for the state's energy landscape and future. The 2021 Oregon Legislative Assembly passed significant legislation that includes 100% Clean Energy mandates (HB 2021), Wildfire Mitigation (SB 762) and Transportation Electrification (HB/HB 3055). As the state regulator of investor-owned utilities, the PUC has emerged as a leader on utility planning for clean energy and wildfire mitigation, especially as new state and federal regulations are adopted. Federal and regional planning initiatives have also resulted in additional responsibilities and workload for the Commission. TNC respectfully requests that the PUC be adequately staffed and funded to meet these new demands.

TNC would like to express our support of the following funding items included in the Governor's Recommended Budget, as you consider PUC's budget for the upcoming biennium:

**POP 101 and 102: Power Systems Expertise and Resources and Increase in Professional Services.** To effectively plan energy services and implement programs, the PUC needs additional staff capacity either through direct hires or supplementary contracting services. There is a particular need for staff with subject matter expertise and technical knowledge related to transmission and distribution system costs, risks, and assets.

**POP 103: Reclassification of Four Positions from Limited Duration and Part-time to Permanent Full-time Positions (HB 2021) and Establishing a New Position.** By reclassifying staff to full-time status, the PUC will be better positioned to implement HB 2021 and respond to significantly increased responsibilities associated with energy industry transitions and decarbonization initiatives, including the Governor's Order 20-04. PUC staff are critical to the state's clean energy transition and continued progress to Oregon's clean energy goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support and your thoughtful approach to the PUC budget.