

April 6, 2023

Joint Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR. 97310

Co-Chairs Dembrow, Pham & Members of the Committee:

The Special Districts Association of Oregon represents approximately 950 districts across the state that provide a wide range of services including domestic water supply, irrigation supply, and water improvement districts to name a few. Although we are supportive of Water Resources Department Budget contained in HB 5043, we do want to express a key concern and encourage Subcommittee to ensure that the Department's transaction department receives additional attention and resources.

We appreciate that OWRD has been receiving funding and position authority in recent years to increase its ability to manage the state's water resources, and we fully support the agency's efforts to this end. But while we understand that OWRD has needed to expend time and effort to onboard new staff and to initiate new programs, we are concerned that these efforts have become a distraction that has reduced OWRD's ability to complete one of its core functions – the processing of water rights transactions. These transactions may seem mundane; they authorize changes to existing water rights, and approve new water uses. But they are critical for public water providers' water management efforts.

Over the past two years, water providers have experienced a significant increase in the length of OWRD's processing times. For instance, the processing time for a "transfer" to change a water right has typically been 9 to 12 months. But we have an example of a surface water transfer application that has been pending at OWRD for 1 year and does not even have a staff person assigned to it. Groundwater transfers are taking 2 to 3 years to complete. As another example, OWRD has generally processed simple permit applications to use stored water from an existing reservoir within 6 months. OWRD recently issued such a permit after a 2-year delay.

These delays in processing water right transactions have multiple consequences; both for the applicants and for OWRD itself. And while we support OWRD's efforts to better manage the State's water resources, we cannot lose sight of the need for the agency to continue to process applications in a timely manner. These transactions are central to its core mission and vital to the State's water providers.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,



Mark Landauer
Lobbyist
Special Districts Association of Oregon