



WaterWatch of Oregon
Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

WATERWATCH

HB 5043-Oregon Water Resources Budget
Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon
by Kimberley Priestley
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
April 6, 2023

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and aquifers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation, and other public uses of Oregon's waters. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch supports HB 5043, though we urge consideration of additional POPs beyond the GRB

Eighteen out of nineteen of Oregon's river basins are already over appropriated from the late spring to the early fall. At the same time, population growth and climate change are increasing the pressure on Oregon's aquifers. The state is seeing increasing incidents of drought, and water scarcity is widespread.

While we recognize agencies are facing cuts, Oregon's economy and environment require additional data and water management capacity to address the challenges presented by the intersection of climate change, economic and population growth and the needs of aquatic habitat and aquatic species. Unless we can find balance in these areas and provide capacity for OWRD to manage the state's water resources, all interests are going to suffer. We have the following comments on both what is in the GRB, and POPS that would add uplift to the state's management of water.

Governor's Recommended Budget:

- **Reject GRB proposed reductions to OWRD's science, management and data work (Reduction packages 090-093):** After decades of underfunding by the Legislature, the Legislature in 2021-2023 provided a significant uplift to the OWRD's management, data and science work. Unfortunately, the 2023-25 GRB has recommended cuts that would eliminate two assistant watermasters (\$368k, GF), groundwater study and observation wells (\$448k, GF) which will stall progress forward on the Walla Walla groundwater study, gaging station funds (\$163k), water management cost share fund (\$106,511), and 10.3% vacancy savings which amounts to approximately 16 OWRD staff positions (\$2.9M). This sets backwards some of the forward movement that arose from the 2021-2023 budget as far as water management and data collection/analysis needed for a sustainable water future.
- **POP 105, ARPA Carry Over, \$15,900,000 OF:** Carries forward ARPA funds authorized in the 2021-23 biennium. Includes Place based planning, fish passage, well abandonment and repair, dam safety work, surface and groundwater data collection, etc

- **POP 111 Water Use, Supply and Availability Data, in GRB is it funded at \$1.3 million, we would request support the ARB ask of \$2,209,905 GF:** This would allow the OWRD to update its Water Availability Model, which is used to determine if water is available for new surface water uses. Funding of POP 111 (at the ARB level) is a top priority for WaterWatch.
- **POP 115 Supporting Complex Issues (CTUIR Water Rights Settlement), \$1.5M, GF:** This would support facilitation costs related to CTUIR's water right settlement.

Additional POPs needed to uplift OWRD water management:

- **POP 114 Watermaster Staff, improving water management, \$1,606,211 GF:** This package would add a regional manager, water master and two assistant water masters in the Klamath basin, as well as an assistant water master in Harney County. These positions are needed for on the ground water management in these basins facing extreme water scarcity.
- **POP 118 Understanding the Lake Abert Watershed, \$1,589,271 GF:** This would fund some much need data in the Lake Abert Watershed, which is a world renowned international flyway but has suffered from lack of water for over a decade. While some of the data work will be funded by HB 3099, that bill does not cover the full costs needed for a comprehensive water budget, thus we would ask that some portion of POP 118 be funded in addition to HB 3099.
- **POP 119 Studying Springs in the Deschutes Basin, \$614,418 GF:** The Deschutes River is a spring fed system; Decreases in spring discharge is of great concern to many in the basin. Understanding the cause of these declines is critical to a number of basin conversations, including the Deschutes Groundwater Mitigation Program. This is a modest investment in information that will be used widely.

Basic functioning of the agency: We would also call out the need for mundane but important information technology work. Discussions in the building this session, including those around “water accounting” highlight the need for this work, including the importance of this type of work to ensure public accessibility and equity. These POPS should be priorities for the state:

- **POP 104 IT Foundation, Modernization and Strategic Plan, \$ 1,471, 393 GF:** This package would allow for much needed updates to agency IT, which will help improve water data delivery and accessibility to the public.
- **POP 120 Improving Data Accuracy and Availability, \$1,724,325 GF:** This package would clean up agency data, which is needed for efficient and accurate work by the agency.

Conclusion: While we appreciate the unprecedented investment in water the state made in the 2021-23 budget, it is critical not only that we hold the line as far as water investments but to continue to grow the data, science and management necessary for a sustainable water future. Whether farmer, city, or fish--- the Department's work is critical to meeting both instream and out-of-stream needs across the state and into the future. We would urge funding of the GRB and additional POP investments noted in this testimony.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Contacts: Kimberley Priestley, WaterWatch of Oregon, kjp@waterwatch.org, Jack Dempsey, jack@dempseypublicaffairs.com, 503-358-2864