



To: Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow, Representative Pham, and Members of the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources

From: Michael Martin, League of Oregon Cities

Date: April 7, 2023

RE: Oregon Water Resources Department Budget (HB 5043)

On behalf of Oregon's 241 cities, the League of Oregon Cities appreciates the opportunity to advocate for investment of state dollars for the Water Resources Department Budget contained in HB 5043. While the state faces budgetary challenges, local governments are experiencing many of the same challenges at the local level and have had to make cuts to budget and staffing levels. We cannot stress enough the need to invest in Oregon's natural resource agencies.

Funding for natural resources in Oregon have long been underfunded and we continue to experience increased fees for services while still witnessing cuts in agency staffing and core programmatic work. The issues that impact natural resources in this state are growing more complex each year. The services provided by the Oregon Water Resources Department are not only critical for effective management of Oregon's limited water resources; they are critical for supporting a growing population, maintaining public health, ensuring public safety (through resilience, fire suppression and dam safety), and promoting economic development.

We urge the state to make additional overall and targeted investments in some of the critical services provided by our natural resource agencies, including the Oregon Water Resources Department.

Package 101 – Facilitate Interagency Work & Implement IWRS – Makes a limited duration position from the 2021-2023 budget a full-time permanent position to effectively implement the IWRS, develop updates, and ensure coordination and integration among state, federal, and local agencies, as well as educational and non-governmental organizations.

Package 105 – American Rescue Plan Act Carry Over – \$15.9m OF Carries forward American Rescue Plan Act funding authorized in the 2021-2023 budget in order for those efforts to be completed, including: place-based planning (\$800k); fish passage (\$500k); Ordnance Project in Umatilla County (\$6m); Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund (\$1m); support fee-based programs and engagement with stakeholders (\$1.5m); engineering services for flood methodology & inundation assessments (\$2.5m); Water Measurement Cost Share fund (\$1m); and support surface water and groundwater data collection field equipment (\$2.6m). Carryover needs are estimates.

Package 108 – Water Rights and Protest Backlog Reduction – Continues investments to reduce water transactions processing times and allow continued progress on the protest backlog. Extends four limited-duration staff (two caseworkers, a protest specialist and an administrative specialist) hired because of legislative actions during the 2021 session meant to reduce water right and protest processing backlogs.

Processing water right transactions in a timely manner is central to Water Resources Department (WRD) core mission and essential to water providers. The above policy option package acknowledges this reality and we support in focused efforts to reduce the backlog.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony. If the committee would like any additional details on prioritization of policy option packages, we are happy to provide any additional information as needed.

Thank you,
Michael Martin, lobbyist