



April 7, 2023

Co-Chair Dembrow, Co-Chair Pham, Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources.

Although The Association of Oregon Counties is supportive of the Water Resources Department Budget contained in HB 5043, there are a few items we would like to flag for this committee and advocate for their continued funding.

The Water Resources Department is the agency responsible for implementing the Place Based Water Planning Program. This locally initiated and voluntary effort helps balance the various and often competing water interests to find a path forward for meeting both the instream and out-of-stream water supply needs. One size does not fit all in county planning for future water uses and as such, water planning needs to be responsive to the unique local, regional and basin dynamics that exist. AOC respectfully requests continued funding for these Place Based Planning efforts in the upcoming biennium.

AOC is a strong supporter of ensuring a sustainable, clean, and adequate water supply for current and future residents, agriculture, and the natural environment. We take very seriously the need to have a safe water supply going to those that need it. Therefore, in response to the water theft occurring in relation to the proliferation of illegal cannabis grows, the legislature created 29 permanent positions to expand the agencies' capacity related to activities around water rights enforcement in the 2021 Special Session. 14 of those positions were for Assistant Watermasters. AOC respectfully requests funding to continue these positions and efforts. We do not want to lose any ground in combatting the illegal grows.

Finally, the Association of Oregon Counties encourages continued funding for data collection in the various basins. OWRD should continue its efforts to conduct groundwater studies and water quality studies to ensure the precious resource we all use every day is actually available. As one Commissioner mentioned in a public meeting last September, *"it would be really nice to know that when we drill a well in the Powder Basin, there is actually water down there. We just assume there is, but there hasn't been a state study of our basin in a long time."* According to the Water Resources Department website, the Powder Basin last had a water study in 1967. We encourage the Legislature to continue funding OWRD's work in basin data collection.

We respectfully request your support for funding these continued partnerships between counties and the Water Resources Department.

Branden Pursinger
Natural Resources
Association of Oregon Counties