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April 6, 2023

To: Co-Chair Senator Michael Dembrow, Co-Chair Representative Khanh Pham, and Members of Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

RE: Testimony in Support of Oregon Water Resources Department 2023-2025 Budget and Components of SB 5043

Co-Chair Dembrow, Co-Chair Pham, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is writing to voice our strong support for the State's continued investment in water resources and specific General Fund allocations for the Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD). The proposed 2023-2025 budget package includes funding elements that will be addressed in this subcommittee as well as the capital construction subcommittee—all of which are necessary for a holistic and sustainable approach to managing Oregon's water resources. We are supportive of allocating resources that will help WRD fulfill its critical mission of serving "the public by practicing and promoting responsible water management."

OWRC is a nonprofit association of irrigation districts, water control districts, improvement districts, drainage districts and other government entities delivering agricultural water supplies. The water stewards we represent operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, hydropower facilities, and deliver water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. Our members, and the thousands of water users they serve, are a vital component of Oregon's economic engine, delivering water supplies to grow food and fiber sold and consumed locally, nationally, and globally.

The ability of our members to prudently manage water resources is intrinsically tied to the capacity of the WRD to provide data and field support necessary for water management, process transactions in timely fashion, and invest in water projects. WRD needs additional resources and targeted investments to support the co-equal goals of meeting current and future instream and out-of-stream water supply needs. The Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) for 2023-2025 has a number of proposals we support but we also recommend inclusion of some components from the Agency Request Budget (ARB). We appreciate your continued hard work in designing a balanced budget that meets the needs of all Oregonians and ask that you include critical investments for WRD programs and related water supply projects in your final budget package.

There are several key packages essential to include in WRD's 2023-2025 Budget:

- ◆ **Water Distribution & Management** – Additional Watermasters and other field staff that are essential to regulating water for both instream and out-of-stream uses, support core functions of agency, and maximizes field staff presence to support timely water management around the state. *(Package #114)*
- ◆ **Addressing Water Rights and Protests Backlog** – Support continued targeted investment in limited duration staff to help reduce backlogs in transfers, protests, and various other water transactions. Delays in transaction processing impacts both out-of-stream and in-stream water uses and is serious barrier to more efficient water management. *(Package #108, #109)*

The mission of the Oregon Water Resources Congress is to promote the protection and use of water rights and the wise stewardship of water resources

- ◆ **Improving Water Data Availability and Access** – Funding for staff and technology needed to update and improve the availability and useability of water supply data. We are supportive of components of the GRB for this priority area but recommend restoring IT positions from the ARB that are needed to effectively implement needed changes. *(Package #111, #119, #120)*
- ◆ **Invest in Projects to Meet Water Needs** – Support additional grant and loan funds for the feasibility and implementation of water projects through the Water Supply Development Account (created by SB 839 in 2013); and the Water Conservation, Reuse and Storage grant program (created by SB 1069 in 2008). We also support additional funding for the new water planning grant program, as contemplated in HB 3163. *(Package #107)*
- ◆ **Carryover of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds** – Support funds being carried over into next biennium to allow completion of important ongoing work, including: fish passage; ordnance project in Umatilla County; Well Abandonment, Repair, and Replacement Fund; Support Fee Based Programs and engagement with stakeholders; Engineering Services for Flood Methodology & Inundation Assessments; and Support Surface Water and Groundwater Data Collection Field Equipment. *(Package #105)*
- ◆ **Restore key packages or portions of ARB**
 - **Restore funding for observations wells and gaging stations** – Both of these are essential data collection tools and reducing funding will stymie progress towards better understanding Oregon’s surface and groundwater supplies. Increasing the number of observation wells and gaging stations around the state is critical need and instead we are seeing decline in available and historical data sources.
 - **Restore GF allocations to Water Measurement Cost Share base budget** – This cost-share account is important to support the installation of water measurement devices around the state—which provide a critical set of data for effective water management. It is important to ensure there are adequate GF allocations to support and match individual investments in new or enhanced water measurement devices, which can be cost-prohibitive for many agricultural water users to purchase without financial assistance.

We recognize the difficult choices you are faced with and commend you for your efforts in funding WRD and Oregon’s other natural resources agencies. As our state faces increased occurrences of extreme weather events and impacts from climate change it is essential that WRD has adequate resources to carry out its core functions, supporting wise water management and multi-benefit water supply projects. It is imperative Oregon continues to make prudent and targeted investments in water supply today to help ensure we have adequate water supplies in the future for our growing communities, innovative industries, and dynamic environment.

We appreciate your consideration of these modest water investments and for your ongoing efforts to develop a balanced budget for the 2023-2025 biennium.

Sincerely,



April Snell
Executive Director