



April 20, 2023

To Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

Re: **Support for SB 5539 and SB 5540 – OWEB Budget**

Co-Chairs Senator Dembrow and Representative Pham and Committee Members,

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts represents the 45 soil and water conservation districts, local government special districts in all 36 counties. OWEB programs are extremely beneficial to our member districts as you will hear from several districts testifying today.

Capacity Grants

The capacity grants allocated through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to the Oregon Department of Agriculture allow districts to

- leverage additional dollars for project development
- participate in implementing the water quality program through ODA
- and to develop conservation on the ground by providing technical assistance to district constituents.

Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP)

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program is important to our districts, represented in the budget OWEB submitted as **POPs 215 and 115** at \$10.8 million. No new investments in this program were included in the governor's budget.

Investment in the OAHP program will lead to:

- investment in conservation easements which districts have the authority to hold
- funding for conservation management plans
- implementation of agricultural conservation practices that can lead to carbon storage, enhanced soil health and other benefits
- additional opportunities for districts to provide technical assistance for their constituent farmers, ranchers, and forest operators.

This funding request is also duplicated in **HB 3366** before this committee.

Staff Investment Support

OWEB has become the premier grant funding entity for many natural resource programs, including some of the other agencies, such as the water quality program at

ODA in which districts participate. OWEB also provides the granting function for several federal agencies, including NOAA, BLM and NRCS. It's important to us that the current staff not only be retained but the additional staff positions in the proposed budget are funded to continue these programs.

Wildfire Funding

A number of our districts and other entities have ongoing wildfire projects that due to their seasonal nature were unable to be completed by this June 30th and without the legislature providing the necessary continuance of those already committed general fund dollars, projects underway will not go forward. You will hear more about that from others.

Support for Grant Funded Programs

You will hear from our members both today and in written comments about the need for OWEB's grant programs for developing projects, monitoring, conservation easements and practices, and other conservation and restoration programs.

We urge the subcommittee to endorse the OWEB budget with the changes indicated in our testimony not only on behalf of our members, but to support the work of the 132 entities who make up the Oregon Conservation Partnership:

- Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts
- Network of Oregon Watershed Councils
- Oregon Association of Conservation Districts
- Oregon Conservation Education & Assistance Network

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.



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