



To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

April 20, 2023

RE: SB 5539 — Relating to the financial administration of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board; declaring an emergency.

Dear Co-Chairs Dembrow and Pham, and members of the subcommittee,

The state legislature previously approved a large investment in fire recovery through grants distributed by the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. We are requesting that the remaining funds set aside for this work be carried forward into the 2023-2025 biennium to ensure meaningful and lasting fire restoration that benefits fish, wildlife, and affected communities.

The damage caused in Oregon by the wildfires of September 2020 was unprecedented. In addition to the loss of life and personal property, key natural resources were impaired as well. Burned riparian forests have contributed to increased summer water temperatures, making it more difficult for fish and other aquatic animals to survive. Steep slopes that were burned, and especially those that have been salvage logged, are prone to slope failure, potentially leading to increased sediments and decreased water quality for both animals and humans downstream.

Native Fish Society, in partnership with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, US Bureau of Land Management, and private landowner Fruit Growers Supply Company, won a Post-Fire Floodplain Restoration Recovery Grant through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to improve stream condition in the upper Molalla River Watershed following the damage of the Beachie Creek Fire. We will be adding large wood to the upper Molalla River and its tributaries in order to trap sediment, retain spawning gravel, and create holding pools. This restoration will improve water quality for the drinking water of the cities of Molalla and Canby as well as creating critical habitat for ESA-listed spring Chinook and winter Steelhead.

However, our ability to complete this work is limited by the current June 30, 2023 deadline. The Bureau of Land Management pledged a matching donation of up to 1000 trees from their property for us to create instream log jams, worth an estimated \$600,000 cash value. But they have federal regulations and permitting requirements to meet before our contractors will be allowed to tip the trees and put them instream. There are also important limits to when construction work can happen in rivers. These “in-water work periods” are designed to protect anadromous fish that may be present and spawning in the river. In the Molalla River, as in many tributaries of the Willamette River, the in-water work period runs from July 15 to August 31. Given that our award was granted on August 25, 2022, we never had time to work within the in-water work period.

We're excited to work with partners across government agencies and private landowners on a project that will help both communities and fish, but in order to do our best work, we need

additional time to complete design work and efficiently work during the in-water work period. If the funding for the fire recovery grants is extended into the 2023-2025 biennium, we will be able to achieve our objectives to the highest possible standard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'E. Perkin'.

Elizabeth K. Perkin, PhD
Northern Oregon Coordinator
Native Fish Society