



WaterWatch of Oregon

Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

WATERWATCH

HB 5506

Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon

by Kimberley Priestley

Joint Ways and Means Committee

May 3, 2023

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and aquifers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation, and other public uses of Oregon's waters. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

WaterWatch urges support of components of the ODFW and OWRD budgets, as well as the HB 3124 Drought Package, that uplift aquatic ecosystems, water management and data.

Rivers in eighteen of Oregon's nineteen river basins are already over appropriated from the late spring to the early fall. At the same time, population growth and climate change are increasing the pressure on Oregon's aquifers, many of which are already in decline. The state is seeing increasing incidents of drought, and water scarcity is widespread.

Oregon's economy and environment require additional science, data, streamflow restoration and water management capacity to address the challenges presented by the intersection of climate change, economic and population growth and the needs of aquatic habitat and aquatic species. Unless we can find balance in these areas and provide capacity for OWRD to manage the state's water resources and ODFW to restore and protect streamflows all interests are going to suffer.

We would urge support of the following:

ODFW's Water Quality and Water Quantity Program: ODFW's Water Program plays a vital role in protecting water in our state's iconic rivers. Adequate funding of ODFW's Water Program is critical to meeting the many instream recommendations of the state's Integrated Water Resources Strategy. Whether it's working to protect water instream, prioritizing streamflow restoration efforts statewide, working in basin collaborative groups, helping develop water policy or working with OWRD to solve complex regional water issues, To support this work we are respectfully requesting the following of the Legislature:

- **Protect ODFW's Water Program from cuts:** With climate change upon us, the work of this program is more important than ever. Current service levels are protected in the GRB, please retain this.
- **Fund ODFW POP 107, Integrated Water Solutions:** Policy Option Package 107 would fund 3 ODFW positions to work on Integrated Water Resources Solutions, including Place Based Planning and other regional collaboratives. Without ODFW participation in regional water forums, regional plans will be severely compromised, and risk not meeting statutory standards to meet instream needs.

- **Fund ODFW POP 110, Statewide Stream Temperature Modeling:** POP 110 is critical to understanding stream temperatures and how they affect Oregon’s iconic species, including federally listed salmon and steelhead.

Oregon Water Resources Department: While we appreciate the unprecedented investment in water the state made in the 2021-23 budget, it is critical not only that we hold the line as far as water investments but to continue to grow the data, science and management necessary for a sustainable water future. Whether farmer, city, or fish---the Department’s work is critical to meeting both instream and out-of-stream needs across the state and into the future. We would urge funding of the GRB and additional POP investments noted below.

Governor’s Recommended Budget:

- **Reject GRB proposed reductions to OWRD’s science, management and data work (Reduction packages 090-093):** After decades of underfunding by the Legislature, the Legislature in 2021-2023 provided a significant uplift to the OWRD’s management, data and science work. Unfortunately, the 2023-35 GRB has recommended cuts that would eliminate two assistant watermasters (\$368k, GF), groundwater study and observation wells (\$448k, GF) which will stall progress forward on the Walla Walla groundwater study, gaging station funds (\$163k), water management cost share fund (\$106,511), and 10.3% vacancy savings which amounts to approximately 16 OWRD staff positions (\$2.9M). This sets backwards some of the forward movement that arose from the 2021-2023 budget as far as water management and data collection/analysis needed for a sustainable water future.
- **OWRD POP 111 Water Use, Supply and Availability Data, in GRB is it funded at \$1.3 million, we would request support the ARB ask of \$2,209,905 GF:** This would allow the OWRD to update its Water Availability Model, which is used to determine if water is available for new surface water uses. Funding of POP 111 (at the ARB level) is a top priority for WaterWatch.
- **OWRD POP 115 Supporting Complex Issues (CTUIR Water Rights Settlement), \$1.5M, GF:** This would support facilitation costs related to CTUIR’s water right settlement.
- **OWRD POP 105, ARPA Carry Over, \$15,900,000 OF:** Carries forward ARPA funds authorized in the 2021-23 biennium. Includes Place based planning, fish passage, well abandonment and repair, dam safety work, surface and groundwater data collection, etc

Additional POPs needed to uplift OWRD water management:

- **OWRD POP 114 Watermaster Staff, improving water management, \$1,606,211 GF:** This package would add a regional manager, water master and two assistant water masters in the Klamath basin, as well as an assistant water master in Harney County. These positions are needed for on the ground water management in these basins facing extreme water scarcity.
- **OWRD POP 118 Understanding the Lake Abert Watershed, \$1,589,271 GF:** This would fund some much need data in the Lake Abert Watershed, which is a world renowned international flyway but has suffered from lack of water for over a decade. While some of the data work will be funded by HB 3099, that bill does not cover the full costs needed for a comprehensive water budget, thus we would ask that some portion of POP 118 be funded in addition to HB 3099.

- **OWRD POP 119 Studying Springs in the Deschutes Basin, \$614,418 GF:** The Deschutes River is a spring fed system; Decreases in spring discharge is of great concern to many in the basin. Understanding the cause of these declines is critical to a number of basin conversations, including the Deschutes Groundwater Mitigation Program. This is a modest investment in information that will be used widely.

Additional POP needed for basic functioning of OWRD: We would also call out the need for mundane but important information technology work. Discussions in the building this session, including those around “water accounting” highlight the need for this work, including the importance of this type of work to ensure public accessibility and equity. This POP should be a priority for the state:

- **OWRD POP 104 IT Foundation, Modernization and Strategic Plan, \$ 1,471, 393 GF:** This package would allow for much needed updates to agency IT, which will help improve water data delivery and accessibility to the public.

HB 3124, Drought Package: Climate change and increasing incidents of drought are putting additional strain on Oregon’s overallocated streams, imperiled ecosystems, declining aquifers, fish and wildlife and the communities and economies that depend upon them. While a number of past drought packages have focused largely on agricultural relief, with the 2022 Drought Package for Ecosystems the state began to balance investments by directing funding to ecosystem work that benefits all Oregonians. Similarly, HB 3124 contains a number of important initiatives aimed at drought resiliency for ecosystems.

As the bill moves forward and the price tag is trimmed, we would ask that the state retain and prioritize all the ecosystem uplifts, including but not limited to the following initiatives from BiDRAWS Package, as well as the agency POPS noted by agency above (ODFW POPS 107 and 110, OWRD POPS 111, 104, 114, 115, 118 and 119)

Bidars Packages, top priorities:

- **1-2: IWRS update and implementation (though need to add ODFW POP 107)**
- **1-4: Tribal engagement**
- **1-6: CTUIR water rights settlement**
- **1-8: Lake Abert watershed (data and water management discussions)**
- **1-14: Increasing OWRD Field Capacity (water masters)**
- **2-4: Increasing water use measurement and reporting**
- **2-6: Statewide streamflow and stream temperature monitoring, Instream Flow Studies and Cold Water Refugia Mapping**
- **2-7: Statewide Stream and Groundwater Monitoring**
- **5-1: Fish Passage Barrier Removal/program capacity**
- **5-3: Water Acquisition Grant funds and Position Continuity (OWEB)**
- **5-8: Studying Springs in the Deschutes Basin**

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

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