

January 21, 2025

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means

RE: Continued Support for OWEB Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez:

The undersigned organizations request your continued support for the OWEB Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program, with an appropriation of \$5 million in the 2025–2027 biennium, as also introduced in House Bill 3341. The OWEB Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program was established with broad bipartisan support in 2023 and plays a vital role in protecting the drinking water supply of small and rural communities across Oregon. Funding is currently available through the 2023–2025 biennium at \$5 million and will be hugely beneficial for the select few public water providers who qualify to receive this initial round of funding.

However, the demand for acquisition funds for source water protection across Oregon significantly outpaces funding provided by the State. A recent survey of community water providers identified up to \$34 million of existing projects in need of funding to support the protection of drinking water source areas in Oregon. With communities facing increased drought stress, extreme weather events, conversion threats, and demand pressures, continuing support for community led acquisition and resiliency efforts for lands around drinking water sources is vital.

In addition to its direct impact in municipalities across Oregon, the structure of the Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program provides unique opportunities for leverage and flexibility. In its current form, the program can be capitalized by General Fund, Lottery Funds, and Lottery Bonds, and support fee-title acquisition, easements and covenants, as well as debt forgiveness. Investments in this program have the potential to deliver significant federal dollars to benefit Oregon. Funding provides direct match for the state Drinking Water Source Protection Fund and Clean Water State Revolving Fund, as well as the USDA Forest Legacy and Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Programs--all of which received historic federal investments through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. These opportunities will leverage state investment in the program, with the potential to access federal funding by a margin of 2:1 or greater, bringing millions of federal dollars into Oregon.

Clean and reliable drinking water is a right of all Oregonians, and OWEB's Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program provides a common-sense and effective mechanism to meet these needs and enhance our state's public health infrastructure. We thank you for your prior support and urge you to provide continued funding of \$5 million during the 2025–2027 biennium for the OWEB Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program.

Thank you for your consideration and leadership on this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

City of Depoe Bay

City of Nehalem

City of Newport

City of Port Orford

City of Reedsport

Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

League of Women Voters

Neahkahnie Water District

North Coast Land Conservancy

Oregon Coast Community Forest Association

Rhododendron Water District

The Conservation Fund

The Wetlands Conservancy

Western Rivers Conservancy

Willamette Partnership

City of Rockaway Beach

Craft3

Lower Nehalem Community Trust

Network of Oregon Watershed Councils

McKenzie River Trust

Pacific Forest Trust

Sustainable Northwest

The Nature Conservancy

Water League

Wild Rivers Land Trust

For additional questions or information regarding this letter, please contact Dan Whelan of Sustainable Northwest at 541-232-7475 or dwhelan@sustainablenorthwest.org