

DATE: April 18, 2025

TO: Joint Committee on Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

FROM: Oregon Environmental Council

RE: 2025-2027 Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Budget (SB 5520)

Founded in 1968, the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization. We advance equitable, innovative and collaborative solutions to Oregon's environmental challenges for today and future generations.

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy and members of the committee,

OEC strongly supports full funding for DEQ.

Much of OEC's work focuses on the intersection between the environment and human health. We rely on and partner with DEQ's Water Quality Division on a near-daily basis, as they are responsible for safeguarding Oregon's water quality. We see firsthand how funding shortfalls reduce the agency's ability to protect and improve the quality of Oregon's water resources.

Now more than ever, DEQ needs full and adequate funding for their work. Changes in federal funding streams, and the uncertainty associated with those changes, means that the state needs to step up to the challenge of ensuring a fully functional and effective DEQ. This means, in part, providing the resources needed to support the agency's work. We can't afford to continue the harmful tradition of underfunding our natural resources agencies, who often get less than 2% of the state's resources for their important and essential work.

We strongly support fully funding DEQ and in particular want to call out the following POPs, included in the GRB:

- POP 120, which will maintain fee-funded water quality programs by authorizing fee increases to maintain current service levels in the Water Quality Division (includes Onsite Septic System Permitting; Wastewater Operator Certifications; Section 401 Water Quality Certifications Dredge/Fill; Underground Injection Control).
- POP 121, which provides support for the Water Infrastructure Grant and Loan program by authorizing two new positions. Using existing funds, this will enhance and expedite customer support, technical assistance, coordination, and process improvements for grant and loan programs disbursing federal and state funds, including the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.
- POP 181/191, which provides non-limited expenditure approval to fund bond issuance costs to provide the state match component to maintain Oregon's Clean Water State Revolving Fund.

- POP 182/192, which provides non-limited expenditure limitation to cover bond issuance costs, including legal and other fees associated with bonds issued to provide the funds needed to support DEQ's critical gaps in laboratory infrastructure. The agency's lab facilities are outdated and insufficient for processing the number of materials and the quantities of materials we need for protecting our water resources.

Not included in the GRB, but part of the ARB is POP 170, which addresses critical staff shortages. Without this funding, essential service areas will be left without sufficient staff to deliver those services. POP 170

- establishes four positions to increase capacity and technical support for issuing and implementing Clean Water Plans, enabling a comprehensive strategy for evaluating TMDL implementation progress, in collaboration with existing monitoring and assessment program Integrated Report responsibilities, supporting data needs of sister agencies and other TMDL designated management agencies. Without additional funding, DEQ is at-risk for missing court-ordered TMDL issuance timelines, and there will be limited capacity to support designated management agencies and others affected by TMDL issuance.
- provides General Fund support to sustain the two positions that otherwise must be eliminated due to a federal fund revenue shortfall. Specifically, the funding would allow DEQ to retain one permit writer in the wastewater permitting program, and one basin coordinator serving the watershed management section in DEQ's Northwest Region. Restoring these two positions with General Fund support will sustain current service levels in program areas that are critical for protecting water quality, public health and beneficial use of water resources for all Oregonians.
- provides support for DEQ IWRS contributions and support.

We also ask that you fully fund Water Quality Division to fully implement the Groundwater Quality Management Act. This request is not included in the GRB but is in the ARB, and is essential to protecting water quality in our state. We need to provide resources to allow DEQ to lead and provide oversight for interagency collaboration required to address areas that have contamination levels of concern or have been designated as Groundwater Management Areas – and also for core programmatic activities within DEQ's purview and areas of responsibility that are critical for groundwater protection.

Finally, we do not support any proposed reductions to the Water Quality Program found in the GRB, including

- reducing the number of water quality permit writer and storm water compliance specialist positions
- reducing the number of positions responsible for addressing non-point source pollution
- reducing the number of DEQ staff positions supporting IWRS coordination

These reductions will result in decreased water quality, decreased client services, and decreased cross-agency coordination.

Thank you for considering our comments. We hope that our priorities, and the priorities of the agency will be addressed as the committee moves forward on SB5520