

DATE: Feb 3, 2026

TO: Senator Lieber, Co-Chair
Representative Sanchez, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Oregon Water Partnership

RE: **Protecting Natural Resource Agency Funding Critical to a Sustainable Water Future**



Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Sanchez, and Members of the Committee,

Oregon Water Partnership urges you to protect the critical funding that enables our natural resources agencies to manage water sustainably and support communities and ecosystems across the state.

Oregon Water Partnership is a diverse partnership of statewide conservation groups with a common goal: to advocate for balanced water policies that ensure cold clean water to sustain healthy communities, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Our priorities are to build resilience for Oregon's water future, bring water data into the 21st century, support smart water management, and protect and restore our waters. We collectively have tens of thousands of members in Oregon communities across the state, and our organizations work collaboratively with cities, counties, Tribes, farmers, ranchers, and forest owners to restore natural habitat and improve watershed function.

In previous legislative sessions, Oregon Water Partnership and our member organizations have consistently worked to secure essential funding for these agencies. Last year, we also wrote to the Governor's Office urging that all service levels be maintained across Oregon's key water agencies. These agencies represent only a small fraction of the state budget, yet their work delivers outsized benefits for Oregon's people, ecosystems, and economies.

As the Natural Resources Subcommittee begins deliberating reductions to the 2025-2027 legislatively adopted budget, we respectfully ask the subcommittee to protect the following from cuts:

Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD)

It is critical that water management, science and data functions, including staff, are retained as these core services benefit all Oregonians. We urge you to protect the following from cuts (by fund type, in priority order).

- **No cuts to current staff:** We oppose any cuts to current staff; water is complicated and vacating current positions undermines existing programs and results in inefficiencies over time.
- **OWRD GF #14 priority for cuts, Groundwater investigations (\$620,000):** These investigations are essential as groundwater declines are increasing across the state. Lack of groundwater data has led to some of the crises we have seen in the Harney, Klamath and Umatilla basins.
- **OWRD GF #13 priority for cuts, Gaging stations (\$260,000):** Streamflow gauges are critically important to managing surface water and to long

term planning. More gauges are needed across the state and cutting this work sets the state backwards in its long-term goals.

- **OWRD GF #16 priority for cuts, HB 2018 ET funds (\$300,000):** Evapotranspiration data is an increasingly important tool for data-driven water management. This work must continue as the agency works to modernize its functions.
- **OWRD GF #5 priority for cuts, Water Measurement Cost Share program (\$121,074):** As the state moves forward with water management and reporting work, having a cost share program in place to help water users is critically important to help defray costs.
- **OWRD OF #3 priority for OF cuts, Lay off three filled Natural Resource Specialist Positions (\$360,000):** The caliber and experience of OWRD staff cannot be overstated. The proposed cuts could affect meeting HB 2145 related to well log reviews, processing of hydro instream conversions, flow decommissioning work and FERC comments, delay completing basin studies.
- **OWRD OF # 2 priority for cuts, Delay filling two vacant other fund positions until next biennium (\$360,000).** This could delay assistant watermaster duties, which would impact on the ground management of water rights.

Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW)

The work of ODFW's Water Quality and Quantity Program is vital to Oregon's fish and wildlife, cultures, communities and economies. This program is the lynchpin for meeting the state's instream goals set forth in the Integrated Water Resources Strategy, and is essential to meeting Governor Kotek's climate goals as set forth in EO 25-26. We strongly urge the protection of all staff in the OWRD Water program. Additionally, we urge you to defend the following from cuts:

- **ODFW # 5 priority for cuts: ODFW Water program \$88,498 GF:** This would cut Water Program GF SS- USGS Stream Gauges. Stream gauges are important to ODFW's work to protect and restore streamflows in wildfire-impacted or data-limited basins.
- **ODFW #14 priority for cuts:** ODFW Water Program, \$265,993 GF, no FTEs: Water Program GF SS- USGS Stream Gauges. Stream gauges are important to ODFW's work to protect and restore streamflows in wildfire-impacted or data-limited basins.

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

DEQ also plays an important role in water right application review and basin planning efforts. We would urge rejection of the following proposed cuts.

- **DEQ #1 priority for cuts: Delay hire in Water Quality TMDL/Watershed Management Program (\$114,768 GF).** Delaying the hire will affect the pace of efforts needed to develop TMDL materials and data necessary for development of Deschutes Basin TMDLs, as well as other watershed restoration efforts in the Klamath and other parts of Eastern Region.
- **DEQ #10 priority for cuts: Cease Harmful Algae Bloom monitoring and advisories in recreational waters (\$95,695 GF).** This package will lead to a statewide pause on harmful algal bloom monitoring and advisories, leaving communities at risk of exposure to dangerous HAB toxins in recreational water bodies.
- **DEQ #11 priority for cuts, Water Rights and Place Based Planning (\$353,750 GF).** This will significantly slow DEQ's review of water rights

applications and capacity to provide water quality technical expertise for place-based water planning efforts by vacating two filled positions. This represents a 50% cut to the overall staffing level for DEQ participation in integrated water resource coordination efforts.

Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA)

ODA is the water quality regulatory agency with jurisdiction over nonpoint source pollution from agricultural or rangelands. Accordingly, the agency plays a key role in ensuring conservation and restoration of water quality in Oregon. We urge rejection of the following cuts:

- **ODA #2 priority for cuts: Reduce Pesticide Stewardship Partnership S&S related to ODA position (\$25,998 GF, plus equal OF reduction)**
- **ODA #8 priority for cuts: Halve Pesticide Monitoring Partnership payments to DEQ (\$410,897 GF, plus equal OF reduction).** Currently pays for 4.0 FTE at DEQ to process pesticide-related water samples for ODA
- **ODA #9 priority for cuts: Hold vacant roughly 6 months of a NRS 4 (Ag Water Quality) (\$100,143 LF)**
- **ODA #10 priority for cuts: Hold vacant NRS 4 (Ag Water Quality) an additional 10 months (\$150,214 LF)**
- **ODA #11 priority for cuts: Hold vacant NRS 4 (Ag Water Quality) remainder of the biennium including position related S&S (\$141,093 LF)**

*Note: #s 9, 10, 11 are all the same position, just holding it vacant for longer.

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB)

OWEB grants support foundational conservation and restoration programs in Oregon. The Water Acquisitions program in particular provides funding for instream water leases and other transactions which compensate water right holders for putting water instream to benefit fish, wildlife, and people. OWP urges rejection of the following cuts:

- **OWEB #1 in 2.5% reduction: \$1,138,171 one-time reduction in Other Funds for Water Acquisitions and Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP).**
- **OWEB #2 in 2.5% reduction: \$929,425 one-time reduction in Other Funds for Water Acquisitions and OAHP.**

Thank you for considering our requests and please contact us with any questions.

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