



## **OREGON FARM BUREAU TESTIMONY**

### **Joint Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee**

**March 13, 2017**

### **Department of Environmental Quality Budget**

### **HB 5518**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the budget for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). DEQ has several programs that our members regularly interface with, so we have a vested interest in DEQ's budget for key program areas.

Given DEQ's large breadth of program areas, we understand how difficult it is for the agency, the governor's office and the legislature to assess relative priorities between the programs. However, we have some concerns with the recommendations provided by the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) for DEQ. For example, the GRB places certain groundwater program positions on the "cuts" list, while advocating for a multi-million dollar data management system (EDMS, POP 161).

The groundwater quality program has been cut severely in the last several years, which has hindered the ability of the program to evaluate and address potential groundwater quality impacts in many areas of the state. The program gained back positions in the 2015-17 biennium, but we worry about the fate of these positions. Given the importance of groundwater in many rural areas to drinking water and irrigation supply, we strongly recommend that the legislature continue the 2015-17 biennium funding levels for this program.

While we understand protecting the groundwater program may be challenging in a difficult budget year, we think there are cost savings to be found within some of the new program areas requested by DEQ. For example, DEQ requests nearly \$8 million in bonding authority (with over \$1 million in debt service) for its Electronic Data Management System. While we appreciate and support DEQ's goal of meeting the federal requirement for e-reporting under NPDES permits, DEQ has asked for the Bentley of data systems when the Cadillac would do. In a tight budget year, DEQ should not receive more resources than necessary to meet its obligations, especially when it will be at the expense of other critical programs.

Finally, we request that the legislature maintain close oversight over DEQ's use of its resources. Over the past year, we have noticed several instances where DEQ is not

coordinating closely with sister agencies who are working on similar programs, resulting in duplication of activities. Additionally, DEQ recommended to the EQC this year that they spend hundreds of hours of staff time and resources pursuing additional protections for a waterway that was already part of a federal wild and scenic designation, a mining moratorium, and countless other layers of protections. Given the number of other pressing priorities DEQ has, this was not a good use of staff time, and DEQ should not have recommended pursuing the project. DEQ should coordinate with sister agencies to avoid duplication of resources and ensure that its resources are being devoted to the highest priority issues.

Please do not hesitate to direct questions to Mary Anne Nash at Oregon Farm Bureau ([maryanne@oregonfb.org](mailto:maryanne@oregonfb.org)).