



March 7, 2019

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Co-Chairs Rep. Reardon and Sen. Taylor
Senator Frederick
Senator Girod
Representative Hayden
Representative Holvey
Representative Neron
Representative Brock Smith

Re: Trout Unlimited Comments on HB 5043 (Department of Water Resources Budget)

Dear Co-Chairs Rep. Reardon and Sen. Taylor and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill (HB) 5043, the proposed budget for the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) for the 2019-2021 fiscal years. My name is Chandra Ferrari and I represent Trout Unlimited, a non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of cold-water fishes, such as trout and salmon, and their habitats. Trout Unlimited has more than 300,000 members and supporters nationwide including over 3,000 in Oregon.

Oregon's cold-water fish populations are of significant cultural and economic value, yet their persistence is threatened by several stressors including climate change, drought conditions (which are expected to occur with increasing frequency) and population growth. These factors and others will continue to place increasing pressure on the water resources of the State and Oregon's ecosystems. To ensure that Oregon is prepared to meaningfully address these challenges it must take action to acquire basic information about the condition of its water resources, implement and incentivize better water management practices and take action to ensure sufficient water remains instream for sensitive fish species. Accordingly, TU supports Senate Bill 5043 and efforts to ensure that OWRD has sufficient resources to meaningfully implement its mandates.

TU supports many of the recommendations in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) however we are concerned that some critical OWRD programs did not receive any funding in the GRB and some were underfunded. TU's specific recommendations are below.

Programs that received no funding in GRB

Improving Water Use Measurement and Reporting (\$1,428,313 GF)

The GRB did not include resources to enable OWRD to increase the pace and scale in which it is able to secure measurement and reporting of water use to better understand current demands on water resources. Sustainable water management requires accurate data on water diversion and use. An increased understanding of water use through more accurate measurement will result in many benefits to a diverse range of stakeholders including improved water rights administration, improved understanding of available water supplies, better means to protect senior water rights and ability to efficiently manage and use water during times of drought. Having this understanding is also critical for ensuring the adequate protection of fishery resources. Watersheds with little or inaccurate information on water use and availability are susceptible to over-allocation, which often leads to inadequate instream flows for fish.

Recommendation: The GRB includes no additional funding for this program. TU recommends full funding of this package. At a minimum, sufficient resources should be provided to allow OWRD to make progress toward securing measurement and reporting of “significant diversions” in priority watersheds consistent with OWRD’s strategic plan for improving water management statewide.

Programs that received partial-funding in the GRB

Supporting Water Management in the Field (\$1,502,450 GF)

This package, if fully funded, will increase the number of watermasters in the field by four, as well as add a hydrotech to address surface water gauging / measurement. Watermaster workloads continue to increase statewide due to a number of factors including an increasing number of water rights/water conflicts in all basins, yet assistant watermaster positions have significantly declined from a high of 37 in 1981. These positions are critical to ensuring effective water management throughout the state and their importance will deepen as drought and climate change continue to increase competition for water resources.

Recommendation: The GRB includes 754,000. TU recommends full funding of this package.

Groundwater Data, Management and Protection (\$3,558,247 GF)

This program facilitates the acquisition of critical information necessary for effective management of Oregon’s water resources. Specifically, this information will allow the state to manage its increasingly limited groundwater resources and maximize the consumptive and non-consumptive uses of water in the basin. Many rivers in Oregon are over-appropriated (particularly during the irrigation season) resulting in a significant number of water rights applications for groundwater use. The 2016 Oregonian series “Draining Oregon”, noted that OWRD often makes decisions on these applications without adequate information. In fact, the series noted that at current spending levels, officials wouldn't finish analyzing the State's 18 drainage basin until 2096. While detailed study of all 18 basins is probably not necessary or warranted, it is clear that several of our basins are currently in extreme risk and immediate study and action is necessary to provide for appropriate long-term management of our community’s water resources. It is critical that OWRD make decisions based on sound science as impacts to

aquifers are far-reaching and, in some cases, irreversible. Groundwater be extracted sustainably in a way that meets both human needs and the needs of species and ecosystems.

Recommendation: The GRB includes 2.8 million. TU recommends full funding of this package. Please note that TU is also supporting HB 2856 for funding groundwater studies. HB 2856 would direct \$9,000,000 to the Water Resources Department to fund groundwater studies in recognition of the significant costs associated with moving groundwater studies forward at a meaningful scale. It would also direct the department to provide a 10-year plan to the legislature that prioritizes ground water studies and report to the legislature periodically to detail its use of appropriated funds.

The Governor's Water Vision

One of Governor Brown's priority initiatives is seeking a secure and resilient water future for all Oregonians. One of the first steps to furthering this effort is the acquisition of critical information that will help Oregon determine how best to strategically invest in built and natural infrastructure. The GRB includes Package 104 which includes 100,000 in general fund to develop a business case analysis of the need for investment in water infrastructure. TU supports this package. TU also supports Package 101 which provides funding support for current place-based planning groups in Harney-Malheur Lake, Lower John Day, Mid-Coast, and Upper Grande Ronde, and for conducting an evaluation of the place-based approach to water planning. The place-based planning approach is a potential mechanism to help forward the Governor's Water Vision and it is important to allow the current efforts to complete and be evaluated.

Recommendation: Include allocation of 100,000 to conduct a business case analysis. Include 979,950 to complete current place-based planning efforts and conduct an evaluation of the approach.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Chandra Ferrari
Senior Policy Advisor
cferrari@tu.org
(916) 214-973