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Oregon Water Partnership applauds bipartisan progress on water in the 2023 legislative session

Policy enhancements, major investments improve Oregon's drought resiliency, water security

SALEM, OREGON, August 7, 2023 – Rivers, groundwater, and communities across Oregon will benefit now that Governor Kotek has signed a suite of bipartisan bills that improve water policy and invest \$174 million in drought resiliency and water security.

"These policies and investments come at a critical time as Oregon's water challenges grow more acute in an era of megadrought and climate change," said Zach Freed, Sustainable Water Program Director with The Nature Conservancy in Oregon. "Oregon Water Partnership is encouraged that the result benefits both nature and people. We look forward to working with agencies and stakeholders to ensure this investment helps build a more resilient water future."

"Oregon's water resources are under increasing strain from hotter summers, warmer winters, and more extreme weather events like droughts, wildfires, and floods," said Caylin Barter, Senior Manager of the Oregon Water Policy Program at the Wild Salmon Center. "We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to improve the stewardship of our shared water supply. Oregon Water Partnership looks forward to continuing to work with Governor Kotek's office, legislators, agency staff, and stakeholders to ensure that water resiliency remains a top priority."

This important legislation moved due to the shared labors of many in both the House and the Senate, and Oregon Water Partnership applauds those bipartisan efforts to achieve better water management for Oregon.

Critical policies and investments include:

Modernizing water laws:

House Bill 3164 (Split-season instream leasing): Split-season instream leasing is a voluntary streamflow restoration tool that enables farmers and ranchers to use their water rights for irrigation during the early growing season, and then leave water in the river in late summer as streamflows drop and fish struggle to find enough cold water. Supported by conservation and agriculture alike, HB 3164 made split-season instream leasing permanent and removed a ten-year cap on participation.

House Bill 2010 (Water-use reporting authority): While the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) is responsible for allocating and managing water rights in Oregon, the agency lacks significant data on water usage. Many water users are not required to measure their usage, while some who do measure have not been required to report it. House Bill 2010 authorizes OWRD to require reporting of measured water use, which is critical for smart water management.

Investing in water agencies:

Oregon Water Resources Department

- **Watermaster Staff (\$456,014).** *HB 5043.* Increases OWRD's field staff capacity to improve water management in high-need basins.
- **Water Use, Supply, and Availability Data (\$2,209,905).** *HB 5043.* Funds critical upgrades to the statewide Water Availability Reporting System, which is used to inform new water right permitting decisions.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

- **Fish Passage Infrastructure (\$8,750,000).** *SB 5506.* Funds grants for projects that restore fish passage to habitat blocked by artificial barriers like culverts, spillways, and outdated diversion structures.
- **Statewide Stream Temperature Monitoring (\$1,350,518).** *SB 5509.* Funds staff capacity and equipment for enhanced water temperature monitoring in priority fish streams to understand the impact of drought.
- **Ecosystem Drought Resilience (\$1,267,131).** *SB 5509.* Allocates \$1 million to the Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund specifically for drought resilience projects, and makes permanent an existing OCRF Coordinator position.
- **Fish Screens and Passage (\$236,862).** *SB 5509.* Re-establishes Fish Passage Coordinator position to help secure federal funding for removal of fish passage barriers.
- **Instream Needs and Priorities (\$463,724).** *SB 5509.* Increases capacity to study and improve streamflows for fish.

Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

- **Emergency Response Grants Carry-forward (\$27,835,464).** *SB 5539.* Carries forward funding allocated during 2021-2023 biennium for post-fire restoration, drought relief, and streamside restoration projects.
- **Emergency Response Grants Staffing (\$2,222,128).** *SB 5539.* Continues staff capacity to administer funding related to Emergency Response Grants.
- **Water Acquisition Grants Carry-forward (\$9,214,020).** *SB 5539.* Carries forward funding allocated during 2021-2023 biennium for voluntary water acquisitions to increase streamflows in Oregon rivers.
- **Water Acquisitions Continuation (\$382,146).** *SB 5539.* Funds a coordinator position for the Water Acquisitions Grants program.

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Oregon Water Partnership is a coalition of seven conservation groups that work together to secure reliable access to cold clean water to sustain healthy communities, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Our members: Environmental Defense Fund, Oregon Environmental Council, Sustainable Northwest, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, WaterWater of Oregon, and Wild Salmon Center.