



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF OREGON**

April 15, 2009

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
Senator Vicki Walker and Rep. Bob Jenson, Co-Chairs

Re: SB 5521, Budget for the Department of Environmental Quality

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots nonpartisan, political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. In 2007, the League authorized a new study of water quality and quantity in Oregon (<http://www.lwvor.org/recentstudies.htm#Water>). For the last 18 months, members have researched Oregon's rules and laws to better inform members of the complexity of our laws and help us move to the second part of the study: What issues are facing Oregon now and in the future and what options should be considered to reflect those changes?

During this work, it became clear that there are a number of agencies whose missions overlap when it comes to water quantity and quality. You have heard many of those budgets so far. We encourage your continuing questioning and seeking to find new ways of doing business in Oregon so those linkages are better connected and work does not overlap. While these tough budget times make such work more difficult, it may also be the catalyst.

One area of concern that arose from our study relates to septic systems and their linkage to water quality in many parts of the state. We encourage that funding be continued for the work of the Onsite Septic Advisory Committee. We know that there is an estimate of 3,800 new wells being drilled annually. If those wells are connected with new rural development, we can assume that many new septic systems. That is a significant potential water quality issue.

We know that toxics in many forms are also threatening our water quality. Assuring that DEQ can continue to work toward addressing this health issue for Oregonians should be another priority.

We commend the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for clearly linking their budget to the Key Performance Measures (KPMs) set by the legislature. The League believes KPMs will move us toward better outcomes. We also support that policy bills need to help guide the agency's work. Policy being set this session and past sessions should help guide the budget for this agency. We are hopeful that work on a statewide water strategy can begin next biennium, even with limited budget dollars. DEQ will need to play a major role in that effort.

We believe the work of DEQ in protecting Oregonians by monitoring clean water and clean air regulations is critical. Even in tough budget times, we cannot let our environment degrade. Like education, public safety and social programs, these issues affect not only this but future

generations. We note that the water quality program might suffer significant reductions due to their reliance to the General Fund and we are very concerned.

We commend DEQ for linking management cuts to staff cuts, recognizing that, with less staff, there is less need for managers. We continue to be concerned when we see technology/data positions being offered for cuts by agencies since data availability and access to information on the web often **saves staff time** and costs.

We appreciate the leadership of the department in working toward holistic approaches. We note that DEQ is not as reliant on the General Fund as the Water Resources Department, but caution that fees for service should be balanced with a public investment so that staff and the public believe applications for service are processed fairly. With an overburden on the applicant, there can be a **perception** that the applicant is paying for a service with the expectation of a positive outcome, regardless of the law. That is not helpful to the department or the state and unfair to the applicant.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss this important agency budget.



Marge Easley  
LWVOR President



Peggy Lynch  
Natural Resources Coordinator