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OREGON WATER RESOURCES CONGRESS

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This testimony is submitted to the United States House of Representatives Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies regarding the proposed FY 2010 budget for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on behalf of the Oregon Water Resources Congress by Anita Winkler, Executive Director.

OWRC is requesting appropriations for the following Department of Agriculture programs for FY 2010:

- \$2 Billion for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program;
- \$73 Million for the Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program;
- Full funding for Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (set aside of 6% of all conservation programs under Title II, Sub-title D of the Farm Bill)
- \$100 Million for Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention as well as watershed planning.
- \$37.5 Million for Conservation Innovation Grant Program.

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) was established in 1912 as a trade association to support district member needs to protect water rights and encourage conservation and water management statewide. OWRC represents non-potable agriculture water suppliers in Oregon, primarily irrigation districts, as well as water control districts, other special districts and local governments. The association represents the entities that operate water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower production.

OWRC and its members believe water conservation is key to the future of irrigation districts and similar organizations that deliver irrigation water for Oregon's agriculture. Whether water conservation activities are funded through current programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or PL 83-566 or through new programs like the Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEP) or the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), federal support is essential to the conservation of our natural resources and essential to protecting our food, energy and water supply.

AWEP is critical to solving regional watershed problems like those in the Klamath Basin. This program allows Irrigation Districts to partner with farmers to address regional water quantity and quality issues in local watersheds.

The mission of the Oregon Water Resources Congress is to promote the protection and use of water rights and the wise stewardship of water resources.

The CCPI supports the formation of partnerships with Federal, State and Local governments and private interests to address Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) issues in water basins and sub-basins.

WATER CONSERVATION FUNDING

OWRC believes that water supply issues in Oregon and elsewhere in the nation can best be resolved locally in cooperative partnership efforts that promote conservation with a more aggressive federal funding partnership as defined in the AWEF.

Even though Oregon has a reputation as a state with plentiful water, many areas of the state have experienced and continue to experience water shortages and drought conditions. This is not likely to change as the state faces loss of snow pack and glacier storage coupled with expanding population and urbanization.

The partnerships Oregon's Irrigated Agriculture has developed with Federal, State, and Local government and private entities have proven that conservation can be achieved by leveraging partnerships and focusing on each partner's strengths.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Strengths and Expertise

1. Watershed Planning and Environmental Assessments.

In Oregon the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has a Watershed planning team that has an excellent record of success. The Rapid Watershed Assessment in Klamath helped speed up the watershed assessment process which in turn helped prioritize projects to achieve the most benefits for the watershed.

2. Bridging the Headgates MOU

Coordination among federal agencies is a significant issue. In Oregon the "Bridging the Headgates" MOU between NRCS and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) emphasizes technical support from the federal agencies in a comprehensive manner. The existing MOU should be expanded to provide similar coordination among BOR, NRCS, Bureau of Land Management, Environmental Protections Agency, NOAA Fisheries, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

3. Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEF), Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) and Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

EQIP has become an essential on-farm conservation program for farmers who are irrigation district water users.

AWEP & CCPI help fill a void for multi-partnered conservation projects. Often a large conservation project does not or cannot include the on-farm improvements. AWEP & CCPI allow farmers to pool together to implement a conservation project and, by partnering with the water delivery system, leverage the federal and non-federal dollars invested in the delivery system conservation project with the AWEP and CCPI funding for on-farm improvements for a more successful total conservation project.

Examples

Deschutes Basin

Oregon districts have been working on cooperative conservation partnerships in river basins and watersheds, but work has been limited by partnership funding. Currently in the Deschutes Basin, for example, there is a conservation project that has been cooperatively designed by the Bureau of Reclamation under a “Bridging the Headgates” agreement with NRCS. The completed pipeline project will return 6 cubic feet per second (cfs) to a stream that will support reintroduction of listed summer steelhead and Chinook salmon. The project will also deliver more water on farm and conserve 3 million kilowatt hours of electricity. Each farmer who receives water from this project has committed to do on-farm conservation improvements through the EQIP program. This project is an example of what a cooperative conservation project could look like in partnership between an irrigation district and its farmer members with the funding support the AWEP program could provide. Other projects in the Deschutes Basin have the potential to firm up water supply while providing an additional 70 cfs instream for water quality and fishery benefit, if funding becomes available. Similar examples exist in all of the 20 water basins statewide.

Farmers Conservation Alliance CIG Grant

The Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA) received \$530,000 over 3 years in the form of a CIG grant from NRCS. This grant funding has allowed FCA to develop a system to take the Farmers Fish Screen to market. The Farmers Fish Screen is a technology that allows irrigation to efficiently direct water while protecting fish including ESA species.

The development and market transfer process for new technologies that are highly regulated by State and Federal agencies is difficult, lengthy, and very costly. Because of this, new technologies that work for both fish and wildlife, and agriculture are rare. Funding sources like the CIG are crucial for organizations like FCA to succeed in developing mutually beneficial technologies. Resource solutions that address concerns from both the regulatory/resource protection perspective and the agriculture community perspective are key to long term success for everyone.

HYDROPOWER AS RENEWABLE ENERGY

The 2007 Farm Bill proposes over \$1.6 billion in new renewable energy funding for projects. OWRC supports the inclusion of small-scale hydropower in this funding package. Irrigation districts (and individual farmers) have the potential to build such projects as part of existing piped systems or as districts convert from open ditches to piped systems in the water conservation efforts at existing diversions. These small hydropower projects can provide renewable energy at a low cost in addition to being more environmentally friendly because the existing diversions are screened for fishery protection. It is also important that small hydropower projects be included as part of any “ecosystem” credit or carbon trading plan. Adding fish-friendly hydropower at existing diversions should be a strong part of the renewable energy program anticipated in Farm Bill proposals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed FY 10 budget for the US Department of Agriculture. Our member districts and the irrigators they serve would be well served by the programs described above. Oregon’s agriculture will benefit from water conservation programs, but those programs require Federal participation if the agricultural community is to be able to continue its efforts to address Oregon’s water supply needs through water conservation. Achieving water and energy conservation, in addition to providing water quality benefits, is one more tool to meet water demands and combat our long-term problem of climate change resulting from global warming impacts.

Contact for further information:

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