



Oregon Water Resources Congress

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OREGON WATER RESOURCES CONGRESS
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This testimony is submitted to the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies regarding the proposed FY 2011 budget for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on behalf of the Oregon Water Resources Congress by Anita Winkler, Executive Director.

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 other special districts and local governments that deliver irrigation water. The association represents the entities that operate water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower production.

OWRC is requesting appropriations for the following Department of Agriculture programs for FY 2011:

- ◆ \$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; and
- ◆ \$37.5 Million for Conservation Innovation Grant Program.

OWRC and its members believe water conservation is key to the future of irrigation districts and similar organizations that deliver irrigation water for the nation's agriculture. Whether water conservation activities are funded through current programs like the Conservation Security Program (CSP), Conservation Reserve Program (CPR), 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 will allow 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 will allow partnerships to be formed with Federal, State and Local interests to address basins and sub basins that are affected by Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Clean Water Act (CWA) issues.

Water Conservation Funding

OWRC strongly supports the provisions in the Agricultural Watershed Enhancement Program (AWEP) in Title II Conservation of the farm bill. This recognizes the importance of these provisions as part of the partnerships necessary to focus on cooperative approaches on a basin-wide scale. We believe 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 AWEP.

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.

Currently irrigated agriculture in Oregon has developed partnerships between Federal, State, and Local entities that have proven that conservation can be achieved by leveraging partnerships and focusing on each partner's strengths.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Strengths and Expertise

1. Watershed Planning and Environmental Assessments.

In Oregon NRCS has a Watershed planning team that has an excellent record of success. The use of the Rapid Watershed assessment in the Klamath Basin has helped speed up the process so that on the ground conservation projects can be completed in a timely manner. The rapid watershed assessment has also helped prioritize projects that will bring about the most benefit.

2. Bridging the Headgates MOU

The need for continued coordination among federal agencies, including NRCS, the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), NOAA Fisheries, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), is a significant issue. In Oregon, the Bridging the Headgates MOU between NRCS and the Bureau of Reclamation emphasizes technical support from the federal agencies in a comprehensive manner. A recent discussion among OWRC members and staff and staff from these two agencies about coordinating grant requirements and timing highlighted the benefit of having a functional Bridging the Headgates program. Our first request is to reactivate this program between NRCS and Reclamation. Our second request is to expand the MOU.

The existing MOU needs to be expanded to provide similar coordination with the above listed federal agencies.

3. EQIP, AWEP, CCPI and CIG

EQIP has become an essential on-farm conservation program for Irrigation District water users (Farmers).

AWEP & CCPI help fill a void for multi partnered conservation projects. So often a large conservation project will not include the on farm projects. AWEP & CCPI allow farmers to pool together and leverage the dollars invested in the off farm project with the addition of EQIP on farm projects. Because of the large number of successful project applications for AWEP, USDA will have to obligate a large amount of the annual \$73 million appropriation to existing multi year projects. It is important that the funding for these projects not be interrupted so that they may be completed. Additionally important is new funding for a new AWEP RFP in 2010 for FY 2011 appropriations.

Examples of Successful Projects in Oregon

Bridging the Headgates

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 project that has been cooperatively designed by the Bureau of Reclamation under the Bridging the Headgates agreement with NRCS. The completed pipeline project will return 6 cfs (cubic feet per second) to a stream that will support reintroduction of listed summer steelhead and Chinook salmon. The project will also deliver more water on farm as well as 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 (FCA) CIG Grant

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 Screen is a technology that allows irrigators to efficiently direct water while protecting fish including ESA species.

The development and market transfer 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.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)

Oregon had 8 successful AWEP applicants for the FY 2009 grant program, three from our member districts (described below). The full list of Oregon projects can be found on the Oregon NRCS website, <http://www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/awep/index.html>.

- ◆ **The Dalles Irrigation District Project** in Wasco County will offer financial and technical assistance to adopt intensive scientific irrigation scheduling practices to conserve water, save energy and improve water quality on orchards irrigated through the project partner, The Dalles Irrigation District.
FY 2009 Funding: \$189,437

- ◆ The **McKenzie Canyon Irrigation Project** focuses on irrigation water efficiency with irrigation improvements in the Lower Division of the Three Sisters Irrigation District, which is the project partner. The effort will improve stream flows and water quality for native fish while providing farmers a reliable supply of water.
FY 2009 Funding: \$727,830

- ◆ The **Willow Creek Project** will help landowners in the Lower Willow Creek Watershed portion of Malheur County convert to water-saving irrigation systems, reduce irrigation runoff, and improve water quality in Willow Creek and Malheur River. The project partner is the Vale Oregon Irrigation District.
FY 2009 Funding: \$300,000

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.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the record on the proposed FY 2011 budget for the US Department of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

Anita Winkler
Executive Director