



Oregon Water Resources Congress

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The Honorable Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-3703

[Individual letter sent to each member of Oregon's Congressional Delegation]

October 19th, 2011

Dear Senator Wyden:

I am writing to express the Oregon Water Resources Congress' (OWRC) support for the creation of an infrastructure bank as part of Congress' and the President's efforts to create jobs and help improve the nation's economy. We request that the infrastructure bank include irrigation water supply projects (in addition to domestic water supply projects) as eligible for loans through the bank. Repairing and replacing aging infrastructure in irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts, and other agricultural water supply districts will create quality jobs as well as benefit both Oregon's food supply and environment.

OWRC recommends that the infrastructure bank be modeled after the Clean Water State Revolving Fund program to create a self-sustaining funding source for future projects while addressing critical infrastructure needs and creating quality jobs today. We suggest funding projects in two types of categories—one for smaller projects ranging from \$200,000 to \$2 million, and a second for larger projects ranging from \$5 million to \$100 million. Smaller projects can be under construction more quickly, having a more immediate effect on the economy, and could supply jobs in rural communities in Oregon with the highest unemployment rates.

Many of the projects in Oregon and throughout the West were constructed by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Reclamation 75-100 years ago and are in dire need of repair or replacement. The infrastructure needs of irrigation districts range from replacing open canals with pipe to rehabilitation of large dams that provide water storage not only for irrigation but recreation, aquatic habitat, and other important water uses. Irrigation districts need to not only improve the physical condition of the various water delivery and storage components but also install more durable and efficient types of technology and materials. As federal and state funding for infrastructure is scarce and the costs are great, the opportunities to address these needs, as well as new needs such as impacts from climate change, are limited. But that has not meant that some work has not gone forward.

Irrigation districts in Oregon have made some infrastructure improvements over the last several years with the assistance of programs such as the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART grants. The districts' projects improved water quality and increased stream flows, resolved conflicts between the diverse stakeholders that depend on the water supply, and created sustainability for irrigated farming through enhanced water and energy conservation. In some instances, districts have added small-scale hydroelectric generation to their infrastructure, and with the advent of innovative technologies, Oregon could create hundreds of new renewable energy projects that will not only create more jobs but also cut carbon emissions. However, the ability for districts to use grants for infrastructure projects is limited because of the costs are often far greater than the funding can cover, many lack funding to meet local match requirements, and federal grant funding is limited—all of which could be addressed by the creation of an infrastructure bank.

OWRC appreciates your efforts to help Oregon and our nation return to economic prosperity. A water infrastructure bank that includes irrigation water delivery projects is an important component in economic recovery for the United States.

Sincerely,

Anita Winkler
Executive Director