Oregon Water Resources Congress
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Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act Fact Sheet

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is seeking support for the reauthorization of the Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) Program, which has been introduced as S. 2886 by Senator Wyden and Senator Merkley. **Reinstating this essential cost-share funding program will help water users and fishery agencies better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species while ensuring water supply delivery to farms and communities.**

As a nonprofit association representing irrigation districts, water control districts, improvement districts, drainage districts and other quasi-municipal local government entities delivering agricultural water supplies, OWRC has a strong interest in the reauthorization of FRIMA. The water stewards we represent operate complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, and pipelines, delivering water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. For over 100 years, OWRC has promoted the protection and use of water rights and the wise stewardship of water resources.

Background of the Fisheries Restoration Irrigation Mitigation Act (FRIMA) Program

FRIMA, enacted November 2000, created a federal partnership program incentivizing voluntary fish screen and fish passage improvements for water withdrawal projects in Idaho, Oregon, Washington and western Montana. The funding goes to local governments for construction of fish screens and fish passage facilities and is matched with non-federal funding. Irrigation districts and other local governments that divert water for irrigation accessed the funding directly, while individual irrigators accessed funding through their local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), which are local governments affiliated with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

The FRIMA legislation authorized $25 million annually, to be divided equally among the four states from 2001 forward. The actual funding appropriated to the FRIMA program (through Congressional write-ins) ranged from $1 million to $8 million, well short of the $25 million it was authorized for and far short of what is needed to address fish passage and screening needs across the region. FRIMA funding was channeled through FWS to state fishery agencies in the four states, distributed using an application and approval process based on a ranking system implemented uniformly among the states, including the following factors: fish restoration benefits, cost effectiveness, and feasibility of planned structure. All projects provided improved fish passage or fish protection at water diversion structures and benefitted native fish species in the area, including several state or federally listed species. Projects were also subject to applicable state and federal requirements for project construction and operation.

Need

The FRIMA program meets a critical need in fishery protection and restoration, complimenting other programs through the U.S Fish and Wildlife Services (FWS). Fish passage and fish screens installations are a vital component to fishery protection with several benefits:

- Keeps sensitive, threatened and endangered fish out of canals and water delivery systems
- Allows fish to be safely bypassed around reservoirs and other infrastructure
- Eliminates water quality risks to fish species

Program Benefits

FRIMA projects provide immediate protection for fish and fills a large unmet need in the Pacific Northwest for cost-share assistance with fish screening and fish passage installations and

improvements. A report by FWS covering program years FY 2002-2012 provides state-by-state coverage of how the Congressional provided funding has been used in the program. Compared to other recovery strategies, the installation of fish screens and fish passage infrastructure has the highest assurance for increasing numbers of fish species in the Pacific Northwest. Furthermore, the installation of these devices have minimal impacts on water delivery operations and projects are done cooperatively using methods that are well accepted by landowners and rural communities.

The return of the FRIMA program will catalyze cooperative partnerships and innovative projects that provide immediate and long-term benefits to irrigators, fishery agencies, and local communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. This program is also a wise investment, with past projects contributing more than the required match and leveraging on average over one dollar for each federal dollar invested. FRIMA provides for a maximum federal cost-share of 65%, with the applicant's costshare at 35% plus the on-going maintenance and support of the structure for passage or screening purposes. Applicants operate the projects and the state agencies monitor and review the projects.

Examples of Irrigation District FRIMA Projects in Oregon

Santiam Water Control District Project: *Fish screen project on a large 1050 cubic feet per second (cfs) multipurpose water diversion project on the Santiam River (Willamette Basin) near Stayton,*
*Oregon. Partners are the Santiam Water Control District, ODFW, Marion Soil and Water Conservation District, and the City of Stayton. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **$400,000** leveraged a **$1,200,000** total project cost. Species benefited included winter steelhead, spring Chinook, rainbow trout, and cutthroat trout.*

South Fork Little Butte Creek: *Fish screen and fish passage project on a 65 cfs irrigation water diversion in the Rogue River Basin near Medford, Oregon. Partners are the Medford Irrigation District and ODFW. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **$372,000** leveraged a **$580,000** total project cost. Species benefited included listed summer and winter steelhead, coho salmon, and cutthroat trout.*

Running Y (Geary Diversion) Project: *Fish screen project on a 60 cfs irrigation water diversion in the upper Klamath Basin near Klamath Falls, Oregon. Partners are the Wocus Drainage District, ODFW, and Jeld-Wen Ranches. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **$44,727** leveraged a total project cost of **$149,000**. Species benefited included listed red-band trout and short-nosed sucker.*

Lakeshore Gardens Project: *Fish screen project on a 2 cfs irrigation water diversion in the upper Klamath Basin near Klamath Falls, Oregon. Partners are the Lakeshore Gardens Drainage District and ODFW. Approved **FRIMA** funding of **$5,691** leveraged a total project cost of **$18,970**. Species benefited included red-band trout, short-nosed sucker and Lost River sucker.*

The reauthorization of FRIMA will fill a vital funding gap for fish screens and fish passage projects that are needed to better protect sensitive, threatened, and endangered fish species, which also benefits the economy, local communities, and the environment we share. FRIMA funds projects that are ready to be constructed and will provide immediate improved protections for fish and immediate jobs for the construction of the projects. Dollar-for-dollar, providing screening and fish passage at diversions is one of the most cost-effective uses of restoration dollars, creating fishery protection at low cost, with low risk and significant benefits.

The return of the FRIMA program will catalyze cooperative partnerships and innovative projects that provide immediate and long-term benefits to irrigators, fishery agencies, and local communities throughout the Pacific Northwest. We strongly support the reauthorization of the Fisheries Restoration and Irrigation Mitigation Act of 2000 and urge the Committee to pass S. 2886. Thank you for efforts to reinstate this valuable program.