

Testimony of April Snell, Executive Director, Oregon Water Resources Congress  
Submitted to the United States Senate Appropriations Committee,  
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development

March 30, 2018

**RE: FY19 Budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Civil Works**

The Oregon Water Resources Congress (OWRC) is concerned about continued reductions to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Civil Works budget and is requesting that appropriations for this program be at least **\$5.5 billion** in FY19. The USACE Civil Works program addresses vital water resource needs throughout the nation, and in Oregon, the USACE Northwestern Division operates on our two largest river systems, the Columbia River and the Willamette River, as well as maintaining Oregon's coastal rivers for navigation. OWRC is concerned that the FY19 budget for the USACE Civil Works budget will be woefully inadequate to meet the growing water infrastructure needs of Oregon and our nation. Increased funding would help support and leverage collaborative state level planning efforts that USACE is engaged in Oregon and nationwide.

OWRC was established in 1912 as a trade association to support the protection of water rights and promote the wise stewardship of water resources statewide. OWRC members are local governmental entities, which include irrigation districts, water control districts, drainage districts, water improvement districts, and other agricultural water suppliers that deliver water to roughly 1/3 of all irrigated land in Oregon. These water stewards operate and manage complex water management systems, including water supply reservoirs, canals, pipelines, and hydropower facilities.

Our members across Oregon face challenges related to irrigation water supply reliability and aging infrastructure. While there are common concerns and interests throughout irrigated agriculture, each basin is unique, and necessitates that local communities' work together to identify their needs and develop solutions to best meet them. The two largest river systems in Oregon (the Columbia River and the Willamette River) are managed by USACE and play a vital role in providing not only water supplies for agriculture, but also ports and passage for transporting food and fiber globally, flood protection for communities, fish and wildlife benefits, hydropower production, and recreation. Additional funding for the Civil Works budget is needed to ensure that USACE has the necessary resources to meet the myriad of infrastructure needs of those systems, without placing the entire burden on the backs of the farmers and ranchers who produce food and fiber for our nation.

**FY19 Appropriations**

We recognize that we must make strategic investments with scarce resources. The USACE Civil Works program is a perfect example of a budget that should have funding increased because the water infrastructure it encompasses directly contributes to the economy as well protecting public safety and the environment. The Civil Works program includes the development, management and restoration of water resources related to supply, navigability, flood control, hydropower, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat across the nation. OWRC feels strongly that USACE

needs substantially increased funding to provide critical repairs on our nation's aging water infrastructure to prevent catastrophic failure, as well as address routine operations and maintenance on other infrastructure before it becomes unrepairable.

### **Willamette Basin Reservoir Study**

OWRC is currently collaborating with a broad water resources constituency to explore options related to the potential reallocation of stored water in the Willamette Basin dams operated by the USACE. The Portland District of the USACE Northwestern Division operates 13 dams and reservoirs in the Willamette Basin, with a combined storage capacity of over 1.6 million acre-feet. The dams were constructed primarily to protect downstream communities from flooding but also store and release water for irrigation, hydropower generation, water quality, fish and wildlife flows, and recreation. Currently, only a small portion of the stored water is under contract for irrigation (through the US Bureau of Reclamation) and there is not a specific amount of space allocated for a specific use in the reservoirs.

Since the construction of the dams in the 1930s, Oregon has seen an increase in population, which in turn has spurred increased development, agriculture and a whole host of new demands on the reservoirs. Municipal water entities would like access to available stored water to better meet drinking water needs for growing communities as well as businesses such as the high-tech industry. Additionally, there are fish and wildlife species in the river system listed under the Endangered Species Act and related ecosystem restoration needs that were not contemplated when the facilities were constructed. As a result, there is strong interest within Oregon to continue the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study and determine how the reservoirs can best help meet the myriad of current and future water demands in the Willamette Basin.

The State of Oregon, through the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), has been working cooperatively with USACE for several years and has provided a 50% funding match (up to \$1.5 million) related to the study. USACE has thus far met its internal deadlines for demonstrating progress, and while some research and modeling has been conducted there remains a need for more time and discussion to develop a balanced and implementable solution. In November 2017, USACE issued a draft Feasibility Study and a tentatively selected plan for the Willamette Project. Subsequently, a lawsuit was filed in March 2018 alleging that USACE (and National Marine Fisheries Service) operations of the Willamette dams are jeopardizing listed species and critical habitat for wild Chinook and wild winter steelhead. It is unknown how this litigation will impact the Willamette Reservoir Study process, but it is still important to continue discussions between USACE, the State of Oregon, and the diverse group of stakeholders who remain committed to a balanced outcome to meet current and future agricultural, municipal/industrial, and fish and wildlife needs.

OWRC would like to see continued funding to support ongoing efforts related to the study included in the USACE civil works budget FY19, and the Willamette Basin Reservoir Study incorporated into the USACE FY19 work plan. Given the complexity of the Willamette system and the diverse benefits that are provided, it is crucial to ensure that any reallocation decision is carefully crafted and appropriately balances USACE core responsibilities to meet the needs of people and the environment we share. Federal funding would not only leverage scarce state

resources but also the in-kind and direct contributions of other stakeholders participating in the project.

### **Planning Assistance to States**

OWRC strongly supports providing funding for states to undertake planning activities to meet their water needs. Oregon is the model for watershed planning and does not need a new federal agency or Executive Branch office to oversee planning, however, federal funding and technical assistance is needed. Planning activities are conducted through local watershed councils, volunteer-driven organizations that work with local, state and federal agencies, economic and environmental interests, agricultural, industrial and municipal water users, local landowners, tribes, and other members of the community. There are over 60 individual watershed councils in Oregon that are already deeply engaged in watershed planning and restoration activities. Watershed planning in Oregon formally began in 1995 with the development of the Oregon Plan for Salmon Recovery and Watershed Enhancement, a statewide strategy developed in response to the federal listing of several fish species. This strategy led to the creation of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), a state agency and policy oversight board that funds and promotes voluntary and collaborative efforts that “help create and maintain healthy watersheds and natural habitats that support thriving communities and strong economies” in 1999.

Additionally, OWRC has been an active participant and supporter of the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (IWRs) adopted by the Oregon Water Resources Commission in August 2012 and updated in December 2017. The IWRs continues to be an important step forward in planning for the various water needs of Oregon but there is much more work to be done and little funding to implement. Providing funding for state-level planning activities will help support important efforts like the IWRs, and maximize the leveraging of state and federal resources, as well as providing viable models for other states to replicate. This approach will help leverage scarce financial resources at both the state and federal level while promoting cooperation and collaborative solutions to complex water resources challenges.

### **Additional Funding Programs**

OWRC is encouraged by the recent additions to the USACE Civil Works program including funding for climate change response, dam safety and earthquake hazard reduction; however, programs as important as these should receive even more funding. Additional funding is needed to support and leverage state efforts to identify and address earthquake hazards. Oregon faces the risk of catastrophic earthquake from the Cascadia Subduction Zone and the State is in the early stages of planning and mitigating to improve seismic resiliency. It is uncertain when or how devastating the earthquake could be but it is clear there would be broad impacts, particularly since most infrastructure was constructed prior to the discovery of the fault and does not meet current seismic standards. Aging water infrastructure is particularly vulnerable and there is a significant need for financial and technical assistance to upgrade reservoirs and other key facilities. Without increased earthquake preparedness and dam safety funding, Oregon cannot mitigate the potential damage. We encourage the Senate to further fund these programs to effectively prepare the states for earthquakes and prevent widespread devastation to people and property.

Additionally, like many other Western states, Oregon has been experiencing more frequent and severe drought conditions. For Oregon, the drought stems from a lack of snowpack that serves as the natural water storage throughout the year for many farms, communities, and fish and wildlife. The impacts may take longer to show, but drought can be as devastating as earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters. 2018 has the potential to be another difficult water year and impacts from prolonged drought take time to recover from and like other natural disasters, the best way to survive and help communities recover is through coordinated planning and developing diverse tools to use when these crises occur. We know from our experience working with our state agency and partner organizations in Oregon that funding for planning, feasibility, and implementation of projects to increase drought preparedness and resiliency is a cornerstone to an economically, socially and environmentally sound approach for a sustainable water future.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we respectfully request the appropriation of at least \$5.5 billion for the USACE Civil Works budget for FY19. The critical nature of the water infrastructure services the USACE provides requires a budget that matches the seriousness of the national need and the importance of the water supply, navigation, public safety, and other natural resources benefits it provides. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the FY19 budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Sincerely,

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