



February 2, 2026

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means

From: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

RE: 2026 Agency Reduction Options

Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the Committee:

OACD represents the 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts statewide, which are special districts with elected boards. The Districts protect and enhance soil and water quality and habitat through voluntary conservation in partnership with rural and urban landowners and managers. The Districts both provide technical assistance and are project implementers. They help landowners translate their conservation goals into practices and projects.

We are deeply concerned about potential cuts to Natural Resource Agencies. The work of protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural resources of Oregon has historically been underfunded, yet it is essential to making sure our way of life and surrounding environment remain in tact for current and future generations. If such reductions are necessary, we would like to point out some important principles that should be followed in making decisions.

Keep a long-term view. Once our natural resources are degraded, they can be very difficult and expensive to restore. What may appear to be savings now can result in paying much more in the long run.

Do not let natural resources take a disproportionate share of the burden. We acknowledge that there are many different and important needs for limited states resources. However, our natural resources are important to the health and well-being of all Oregonians and should remain a very high priority.

Treat any cuts to natural resources funding as short term. As noted above, cuts taken now to natural resource management can result in paying more later. This fact is amplified if cuts are permanent. Any cuts that are necessary should be considered short term, with renewed funding restored or at least considered for restoration in future budgets.

Preserve staffing. When staff are let go, it can take a long time to restore because of the need to go through hiring processes and train staff to the point that they are productive.

Keep a focus on data. We need to continue collecting data and making it accessible to gain a better understanding of the conditions of our natural resources and help us make the best possible decisions as we move into the future. One good example is the need to know how much water is available and how much is used and needed in various regions of the state. Without this knowledge is very difficult to allocate it effectively to the most important needs.

Keep on the ground projects moving forward. Natural resources projects often span multiple years from planning to implementation and momentum is often a key to getting them done efficiently. We should avoid stopping and then starting efforts to plan and implement projects.

Recognize the importance of state funds that leverage other funds. Many natural resource projects rely on funding from various sources, yet state funds can remain critical to making projects viable. We should not be short sighted and cut state funds that would result in the inability to bring in additional funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony and we wish you great wisdom and success in this difficult job lying ahead of you.

Sincerely,



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