

September 18-19, 2007 OWEB Board Meeting Executive Director Update #C1: 2007 Legislative Session

Background

The Oregon State Legislative Assembly adjourned on Thursday, June 28, 2007. Below is a summary of the natural resource budget implications and OWEB policy impacts.

Budget

Funding for OWEB's capital grants program increased by 41 percent to a record \$59.5 million for projects dedicated to watershed protection and salmon recovery. Funding for local watershed councils and soil and water conservation districts was increased to \$5 million each to implement local voluntary conservation under the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. For the first time OWEB will have an expenditure limitation of \$7.7 million for Oregon Plan research grants.

Policy Bills

At the May 2007 Board meeting, staff discussed pending policy bills that intersect with OWEB's responsibilities or grant program authorities. Of those, only three were adopted by the Legislature and signed by the Governor.

HB 2114 "Stewardship Agreements"

Creates Stewardship Agreement Grant Fund and appropriates moneys in fund to Board of Forestry for grants to carry out stewardship agreements. Permits Flexible Incentives Account to be used to fund activities related to stewardship agreements.

HB 2992 "Yaquina Acquisition Bill"

Allows division of lot or parcel in forest zone or mixed farm and forest zone into two parcels if one parcel is to be sold to provider of public parks or open space, or not-for-profit land conservation organization. This bill allows OWEB to complete the Yaquina Acquisition project with The Wetlands Conservancy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

SB 514 "Conservation Easement Special Assessment"

Establishes a property tax special assessment program for property subject to a conservation easement. The bill includes provisions that land in the program must be inspected by the easement holder periodically to ensure that the land is managed in accordance with the terms of the easement, and that at least every three years, the holder must provide written certification to the county assessor that the enrolled land is being managed in accordance with the terms of the easement. OWEB will be affected as the holder of conservation easements, although most of its easements are on properties owned by non-profit or governmental entities that are either exempt from paying property taxes or make in-lieu payments to counties.

Another new piece of policy legislation, SB 544 related to public records requests, will also impact OWEB. SB 554 is addressed in Agenda Item O.

February 2008 Session

Senate Concurrent Resolution 1 outlines the legislative schedule to include a special session beginning on February 4, 2008, and adjourning no later than February 29, 2008. Staff anticipate

that the special session will be limited to consideration of pressing fiscal and policy issues only. Staff will keep Board members apprised of whether any policy or budget bills that pertain to OWEB will be considered in the February session.

Staff Contact

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Melissa Leoni, Senior Policy Coordinator, at melissa.leoni@state.or.us or 503-986-0179.