



To: Co-Chair Helm; Co-Chair Roblan; & Members of the Drought Task Force

From: Tracy Rutten, League of Oregon Cities

Date: October 21, 2016

RE: Public Comment on Drought Tools & Resources

On behalf of the League of Oregon Cities, I would like to extend my appreciation to the members of the HB 4113 (2016) Drought Task Force for your thoughtful participation and effort to ensure that Oregon is better prepared to respond to future drought scenarios.

We further appreciate the opportunity to provide comments to the task force on some specific tools and opportunities, some of which have been discussed by the League's Water Policy Committee.

- **Water Management Conservation Plans (WMCPs)** – We would support and recommend additional financial support for small and lower-income communities to create WMCPs. We will be suggesting that the Oregon Water Resources Department explore opportunities to allow for SB 1069 (water conservation, reuse and storage feasibility grants) to be used as an incentive for small and lower-income communities to voluntarily adopt water management conservation plans. We are not advocating that these funds be used when a WMCP is required as a condition of a new or extended permit. These funds would only be available for communities that are not required to submit a WMCP but would like to have one as a tool to better respond to water supply challenges and potential drought conditions.
- **State Water Conservation Coordinator** – The Oregon Water Resources Department has been exploring, through the budget process, the creation of a new position within the Department that would serve as a communications/public information officer position. While we see a value in having capacity and expertise within the Department to better message to the public during drought conditions, we believe a better use of staff time and limited resources would be to invest in a conservation coordinator who also has experience in communications/public relations. Fortunately, drought is not an annual recurring event. A shift to a conservation coordinator position would allow this person to do critical outreach to all water interests on an ongoing basis to identify needs and better connect water users with available tools and resources. This is not necessarily an item for Drought Task Force action, however, we simply

wanted to make the task force aware of our support for additional outreach support for the Department.

- **Data on Impacts from Drought** – Finally, while we recognize that the Drought Task Force is limiting recommendations to short-term drought response tools as opposed to longer term resources, we would encourage the Oregon Water Resources Department to coordinate with other state agencies to better gather data on impacts from drought. This could include the U.S. Geological Survey, Oregon Department of Forestry, and Oregon Department of Agriculture. The state of California has done recent aerial studies using laser-guided imaging instruments to measure the water content of forest canopies in an effort to better understand current forest health and, specifically, impacts from drought. This can provide for needed data to better understand increased forest fire risk in certain areas, impacts to water quality resulting from forest health degradation and resulting sediment runoff to streams, as well as additional impacts to water supply, various species and ecosystems, and air quality. Again, we understand that this is very likely a long-term strategy to better understand drought impacts and we therefore, will be forwarding this recommendation on to the Integrated Water Resources Strategy Policy Advisory Group for their consideration.

We will share these comments with the Oregon Water Resources Department, the Governor’s Natural Resources Policy Office and the Integrated Water Resources Strategy.

Again, we thank the members of the task force as well as Department staff for your participation in the HB 4113 process and look forward to seeing the final report. If you have any questions or would like additional information regarding the above comments, please feel free to contact me at trutten@orcities.org.