



HARNEY COUNTY COI

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**Testimony before the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
in support of A-Eng HB 4006
Steven E. Grasty, Harney County Judge**

I am Steve Grasty, Harney County Judge. Harney County is the largest county in Oregon with 10,228 square miles and only 7600 people, actually if you have faith in PSU's population estimates our county is down to 7300 from two years ago. If you consider that over 60% of those folks live within a ten mile radius of Burns you will understand that each rural resident has plenty of elbow room, about 3 square miles apiece. It is this fact and the passion that rural Oregon residents have about the place that they live that has kept the environment functioning as it should and generally in very good condition.

Can you imagine a time when government policy would remove populations of humans from the landscape, restrict those folks from having a voice in decisions about themselves, change their way of life or undermine their culture to the point it ceased to exist? Today that is incredible to image but it did happen in Oregon and in Harney County to the Native Americans, to the members of the Burns Paiute tribe.

Since the writing of the Endangered Species Act at the national level many in rural Oregon have felt those same pressures, so far no one has come to force anyone to move but the undermining of rural economics has occurred to the point that substantial percentages of populations have had to seek work elsewhere. Since the listing of the spotted owl in Oregon our county population has shrunk by 18%. Now I cannot tell you it is only because of that listing but there are strong indicators pointing to that being the root cause of change in policy which resulted in the loss of our economic drivers. Harney County, in the seventy's, had the highest per capita average income in this state; we are now in the bottom two or three.

So there are the dire facts that provide the background about why I think we need to change a law. To change that law in a proactive way that institutionalizes the need to always balance environmental needs with social and economic concerns.

HB4006 requires consultation, cooperation and advising the rural communities impacted by any addition of a species to the state endangered species list. I want to assure you that I believe this law is necessary but I also want to point out an important fact. This law was first introduced last session and did not get to the floor for a vote. But just the conversation about the need for this statutory change has brought about a proactive change on the part of ODFW. I have personally witnessed a concerted effort on that agencies part to include our county efforts to consider the conservation of Sage Grouse. As a representative of county government and a community leader I have been treated as a partner in the process. So, I want this committee to know that I am very complementary of the agency on that point. However, at the same time, I believe it is important to institutionalize this change into law.

Sincerely,

Steven E. Grasty
Judge, Harney County Court