NETWORK of OREGON WATERSHED COUNCILS

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MEASURE: HB 2173
EXHIBIT: 4
House Land Use
DATE: 03-05-2013 PAGES: 1
SUBMITTED BY: Ryan Gordon

March 5, 2013

Representative Brian Clem, Chair
Representative Kevin Cameron, Vice-Chair
Representative Lew Frederick, Vice-Chair
Committee on Land Use
Oregon House of Representatives

Opposition to HB 2173

Committee Members:

The Network of Oregon Watershed Councils supports the efforts of over 80 watershed councils statewide that work collaboratively to enhance watershed health and benefit their local communities.

Watershed councils rely on relationships with landowners to accomplish restoration. These landowners include farmers, ranchers, and foresters, as well as individuals in rural and urban communities across the state. House Bill 2173 would make it more difficult and costly for councils to work with these voluntary partners to achieve restoration objectives.

The bill would limit liability protections for landowners who participate in habitat or watershed improvement projects. These liability protections have been an important tool for councils working with landowners to accomplish restoration on private land. The loss of these protections would significantly impact councils' ability to build the relationships necessary to achieve basin-wide restoration objectives.

The bill would also require conditional use permits for restoration projects, increasing the cost, complication, and time required to complete them. In addition to acting as a further barrier to landowner participation, this requirement is especially concerning to councils that often have limited staff and resources to work on smaller restoration projects. In some instances, increased costs associated with permitting fees and staff time could make small, but important, projects more difficult to complete.

It seems unnecessary to erect these barriers in the way of landowners, as well as councils and other partners, who are working to provide public benefits through their stewardship efforts. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to consider targeted, local solutions to the issues that have promulgated this bill, as opposed to broad legislation that could have significant consequences for the collaborative approach councils use to accomplish watershed restoration.