

NORTHWEST RANGELAND TRUST

P.O. Box 2000, Pendleton, OR 97801 Phone (541) 969-9696

March 15, 2019

RE: Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Testimony provided by Frank O'Leary, Executive Director, Northwest Rangeland Trust

My name is Frank O'Leary; I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Rangeland Trust, a position I have held for 13 years. The Northwest Rangeland Trust operates in the states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Our mission is to help Oregon, Washington, and Idaho ranch and farm landowners protect and preserve the long-term viability of their ecologically significant private lands. Simply put, it is our goal to help maintain privately owned working landscapes as privately owned working landscapes.

Currently we hold five conservation easements on approximately 23,000 acres in the state of Oregon. Hopeful, in the next thirty days we will closing on another 3,600 acre easement near Boardman.

I am here today to urge you to support the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program at the proposed \$10M funding level. The funding bill for this program is House Bill 2729.

The work that we have been able to accomplish in Oregon has been severely hampered by a lack of a viable non-federal match for Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) dollars. Each year NRCS allocates funding to Oregon for projects to protect privately owned working landscapes through programs such as ALE. Unfortunately, each year those allocated funds have mostly gone unused because there has not been a viable match for working landscape projects. During my tenure with NWRT, we have had many projects in the State of Oregon that we have been unable to complete because of the lack of a viable non-federal match for NRCS funding.

One such project was the Rattray Ranch on Thirty-mile Creek, a major steelhead-spawning tributary of the John Day River. This potentially was one of the best conservation projects in the state of Oregon and was lost due to a lack of non-federal match. The property is no longer privately owned and will be taken out of agricultural use forever.

Funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program could provide the match that we need to permanently protect the exceptional natural resource values on privately owned properties like the Rattray Ranch.

We are able to access the NRCS funds in the state of Washington and have completed two projects using NRCS funds with the non-federal match coming from a dedicated program that Thurston County has established to preserve privately owned working landscapes.

Thank you for taking the time to travel to Pendleton and I urge the committee to support the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program at the proposed \$10M funding level.

Thank You