



To: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation

From: Julia DeGraw, Oregon Conservation Network, and Oregon League of Conservation Voters

Date: April 5, 2021

**RE: Support for SB 842 – Restore Funding for DoJ’s Environmental and Cultural Resources Enforcement Unit (ECREU).**

Chair Prozanski Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on SB 841. On behalf of our thousands of members and supporters in Oregon, we would like to register the Oregon Conservation Network’s strong support to pass SB 841 to restore funding for the DoJ’s Environmental and Cultural Resources Enforcement Unit (ECREU) – because Oregon needs to be able to enforce important environmental regulations, including poaching.

The Oregon Conservation Network (OCN) is coordinated through the Oregon League of Conservation Voters (OLCV). OCN is a coalition of 37 not-for-profit organizations throughout the state, united to advocate for pro-conservation legislation and to fight policies that threaten our state’s natural legacy. OCN is powered by tens of thousands of Oregonians who belong to their membership organizations, the Defenders of Wildlife being one. We work to promote policies that will ensure a better Oregon for our children – and to fight policies that do not.

**We write in support of SB 841 to ensure the ECREU unit at the DoJ is fully funded through the biennium.**

Since its inception in 2009, the ECREU has been entirely funded by the Consumer Protection and Education Fund. This included funding for the staff attorneys’ time and any prosecution related costs. It was a logical connection since the fund receives fines and restitutions toward the state from environmental polluters and others. In the second special session of 2020, ECREU was decoupled from its funding source. With the decoupling from its original funding source, and not being included in the DoJ’s budget request prior to the decoupling news, ECREU currently stands unfunded. SB 841 restores funding at its original amount, \$1.6 million through the biennium, correcting an unfortunate oversight from the 2020 Summer Special Session that has essentially left the enforcement of environmental crimes unfunded for the entire state.

Without dedicated funding for prosecutors, DoJ will not be able to prioritize environmental crimes cases which will inevitably lead to a backlog of cases that may never make it to court. We also fear that without enforcement of critical environmental regulations, our state’s environmental laws and regulations will not continue to have a deterrent effect—potentially leading to a spike in environmental crimes such as wildlife poaching and illegal wildlife trade.

Oregon is rich in ecologically important biodiversity, and natural and cultural resources — from our rivers and lakes to our pristine forests and the wildlife that depend on them. These resources provide a wide



range of benefits to all Oregonians — livelihoods, health and well-being, sustenance, and mitigating climate change impacts, to name a few. It is, therefore, imperative that our state has the capacity and the resources to protect these resources.

Our anti-poaching and other environmental and cultural resources laws and regulations are only powerful if we follow through with enforcing them—it is imperative that the legislature pass SB 841 and include it in the 2021 budget. The legislature already made a commitment to fund ECREU through the biennium and now we need you to reaffirm that commitment by passing SB 841. Moving forward, in future legislative sessions we would encourage legislators to look into expanding this program—two attorneys enforcing all the environmental and cultural resources laws and regulations in a state as large as ours with such a wealth of natural resources, is an incredibly small program to take on such a large task. For now, however, we are simply asking that ECREU does not go without funding.

ECREU embodies Oregonian values and represents a majority of Oregonians who cherish our state's wildlife and wild spaces. It is clear that without enforcement and prosecution, our environmental policies would be woefully ineffective. When the ECREU program was decoupled from its funding source, it was directed toward General Fund moneys. At this time we are simply asking that directive be met and that ECREU is fully funded.

**We urge you to support SB 841 and restore funding to ECREU so that our natural resources are conserved and sustainably managed for the present and future generations of Oregonians.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia B. DeGraw".

Julia B. DeGraw

Coalition Director

Oregon Conservation Network, and Oregon League of Conservation Voters

Testimony Submitted On behalf of all the OCN Member Organizations:

1000 Friends of Oregon | Audubon Society of Portland | Beyond Toxics | Cascadia Wildlands | Center for Biological Diversity | Central Oregon Landwatch | Climate Solutions | Engineers for a Sustainable Future | Defenders of Wildlife | Environment Oregon | Friends of Mount Hood | Friends of the Columbia Gorge | Friends of Mt. Hood | Greater Hells Canyon Council | League of Women Voters of Oregon | Native Fish Society | Neighbors for Clean Air | Oceana | Oregon Coast Alliance | Oregon Environmental Council | Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility | Oregon League of Conservation Voters | Oregon Natural Desert Association | Oregon Land and Water Alliance | Oregon Wild | Renewable Northwest | Rogue Riverkeeper | Trout Unlimited | Tualatin Riverkeepers | Rogue Valley Audubon Society | Sierra Club Oregon Chapter | Surfrider Foundation | Umpqua Valley Audubon Society | WaterWatch of Oregon | Wild Salmon Center