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February 9, 2021

Sen. Beyer, Chair  
Committee Members  
Senate Committee on Energy & Environment  
State Capitol  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: SB 16

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2160. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

1000 Friends opposes SB 16. The bill would waive Oregon's land use laws to allow up to 100 houses – not related to farming - to be built on up to 200 acres of exclusive farm use lands in the “eastern Oregon border region,” which includes the Malheur County cities of Ontario, Vale, and Nyssa, the areas of Willow Creek and Brogan, and the farm and ranch lands in between. It would allow rezoning and partitioning of the EFU land for the house.

Rezoning farmland to allow more houses that are not related to farming is fundamentally contrary to Oregon's land use program. This would undermine the integrity of Oregon's land use planning program.

Oregonians do need more housing – and more diverse and affordable housing types – near where they work, shop, play, and worship: inside our towns and cities. We also need food and fiber, and Oregon has some of the best land in the world for growing crops, raising cattle, and growing trees. Our soils and water are finite resources, and their value, and our good fortune to have these nearby, has come into keen focus with a pandemic and climate change. We should not, and need not, play these off against one another, by treating working lands as vacant lands.

And this is true in Malheur County, too, where agriculture is an economic engine of the region. Malheur County is in the top five of the state's 36 counties in agricultural production, produces over \$350 million annually in agriculture products, and is among the top beef and dairy producing regions in the country. Agriculture is also Malheur County's largest jobs provider, employing over 20% of working age adults. The state has recently invested in a major rail re-load shipping facility in Nyssa, which will greatly increase the transportation options available for Malheur County's ranchers and farmers to get their products to market quickly. This is not a time to be taking farmland out of production.

And as we have seen in recent years, adding housing that is not related to farming, ranching, or forestry increases wildfire risk in several ways – most wildfires are caused by humans (inadvertently), and puts firefighters and communities at risk. Wildfire maps show areas of "very high" and "high" risk wildfire risk outside of Ontario and Vale, in areas zoned EFU.

And importantly, Ontario has land available for residential development, inside its UGB. In 2008, Ontario established an urban reserve of about 2200 acres. Urban reserves are for the land need beyond the 20-year UGB, if future growth is required. In recent years, Ontario has expanded its UGB three times, bringing in about 600 acres from the urban reserve, consisting mostly of EFU lands and mostly for industrial use, but not entirely. That leaves about 1500 acres still available in the Ontario Urban Reserve, in addition to vacant residential lands already in the Ontario UGB. This illustrates that if there is a demand for homes, including higher end homes, outside of the immediate built-up area of Ontario, there are options, without compromising Eastern Oregon EFU land and our land use planning program.

Instead of opening Eastern Oregon's farm and ranchlands to residential development, the state should invest in growing existing agriculture-related businesses, improving transportation needs of agriculture, incentivizing value-added production, and helping new farms get access to affordable farmland.

Thank you for consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Kyle McCurdy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Kyle McCurdy  
Deputy Director