

April 19, 2021

Public Testimony to the Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources. Re: SB 5502. “Appropriates moneys from General Fund to State Department of Agriculture for certain biennial expenses.”

Dear Co-Chairs, Senator Kathleen Taylor and Representative Jeff Reardon, and Committee Members,

I request that the committee dive-in and take a hard look to restore funding in the State Department of Agriculture budget for the Native Plant Conservation Program. This critical program is currently excluded from the proposed budget, from the best of my understanding, because it is assumed that federal funds will cover the positions to perform mandated tasks to protect our state’s native and rare plants. The problem is that this budgetary scenario is not accomplishing the mandated tasks as required by our state.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture Plant Conservation Program was mandated by the unanimous passage of the 1987 State Endangered Species law to protect our state rare plant species. Unfortunately, this program has had its budget slashed, re-directed and unfunded too many times since then and our native plant communities are facing severe and unprecedented risk as a consequence. In addition to human disturbance, climate is having a huge impact on these species and without the staffing to review, study, and know what’s going on, we are likely to make decisions causing irreparable harm.

The Native Plant Conservation program assists public agencies and private citizens with management issues involving native threatened and endangered plants on non-federal public lands. The program also propagates threatened and endangered (T&E) plants in Oregon, establishes voluntary partnerships with federal, state, local, and tribal governments as well as private land owners to restore and enhance plant populations, and conducts monitoring of T&E plant populations. The program also assists public land managers in complying with Oregon’s T&E plant laws and rules.

Another critical role of the Native Plant Conservation Program is to provide consultation and scientific take and recovery permits for projects involving state listed threatened and endangered plants. Projects requiring said permits include various development, mitigation, research, and recovery projects, all of which get reviewed by Native Plant Conservation Program staff and thus require a considerable level of expertise, and time for review and consultation of permit applications. At this time, these projects (and permit applications) are not being reviewed thus putting both projects and species recovery efforts in serious jeopardy.

Without these permits, many projects and their associated recovery efforts simply cannot move forward. Or, possibly worse, the projects move forward without adequate reviews and our native and rare plants are not protected or flat-out destroyed. Sometimes even by well-meaning homeowners or developers. There simply is not the staffing at the ODA to perform an adequate job at the legislatively mandated role (ORS 564.105–115) that we depend on them to do; in

particular, reviewing consultation requests from state and local public agencies, periodically reviewing the list of T&E plant species, and implementing conservation efforts for endangered plant species.

I live in eastern Oregon and while it is beginning to sound cliché I am experiencing first-hand climate change. For example, on my 14 acre homestead, I have lost half of my trees in the past 20 years to bark beetles and drought and our land is becoming increasingly drier; many wildflowers no longer bloom and there are rare plants that I no longer see.

More recently, our region has been faced with many proposals for energy development and new infrastructure. We currently are facing a problematic situation—primarily due to human development and climate change, that our natural resources, such as native plant communities, are struggling and may not survive. I have personally been involved in the land use and siting process decisions on a few of these projects and have been very frustrated by the lack of support at the ODA and the Native Plant Program. Not because they are unwilling to help--but they simply do not have the resources to provide assistance. This is a real failure of state government and I am urging you to change this!

You cannot wait-- this biennium is the time—please find and restore the funding for the Native Plant Conservation Program immediately and assure that it is included in the state budget (specifically, SB 5502.) By restoring the funding for the Plant Conservation Program we have a better chance of ensuring that we have a viable program for updating our state rare plant list, protecting the rare plants of our state and making sure that we do not have them vanish due to lack of funding and government concern.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and efforts to restore the funding to the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Native Plant Conservation Program.

Sincerely,



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