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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery

Testimony in favor of SB 1534: Natural & Working Lands

Submitted by: Laura Tabor, Climate Action Director

Members of the Senate Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1534 with the -2 amendments, which takes foundational steps to implement the Oregon Global Warming Commission's natural and working lands recommendations.

The Nature Conservancy in Oregon (TNC) is a non-partisan, science-based organization that works in communities across the state, manages lands and waters in varied ecosystems, and partners with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

Effective management of Oregon's natural and working lands is a critical component of our state's overall response to climate mitigation and adaptation. The Nature Conservancy strongly supports this legislation because it acknowledges and acts on the scientific research which clearly shows that natural and working lands (NWL) have an important role to play in sequestering and storing carbon while improving community resilience. It is vital we enhance our current practices to ensure our land sector plays this role while adapting to changing conditions.

We want to emphasize the following factors driving our support:

Science supports prioritizing NWL strategies. Scientific literature on the climate mitigation and adaptation benefits of NWL practices is accumulating rapidly and supports prioritizing NWL carbon sequestration and storage strategies. NWL strategies represent a critical opportunity to increase the removal of greenhouse gases from the atmosphere through proactive management and restoration and to further reduce emissions by reducing activities that increase emissions on NWL. Recent analyses of biological carbon sequestration and storage opportunities in Oregon highlighted the potential for NWL to provide significant carbon benefits.¹

Co-benefits strengthen the case for NWL strategies. Carbon sequestration and storage strategies on NWL can also promote community resilience through a wide range of benefits. For example, restoration and reforestation of floodplains can sequester and store carbon while attenuating flooding and reducing risk to communities. Scientists have high confidence that actions such as managing land and forests sustainably can lead to more productive lands at lower risk of degradation, even in the face of challenging climate conditions. These improvements translate directly into short and long-term

community benefits locally and across ecosystems.ⁱⁱ These examples underscore the importance of SB 1534's focus on establishing activity-based and community impact metrics to track multiple benefit streams from NWL activities over time.

An Oregon NWL inventory is a necessary foundation for strategic progress. We also support dedicating resources to a state-specific, comprehensive natural and working lands carbon sequestration and storage inventory. While sufficient data exist to demonstrate that there is broad potential for NWL to contribute to climate mitigation, current inventory methods are not sufficient to draw detailed conclusions about the baseline carbon storage and sequestration within NWL sub-sectors or to track changes in carbon storage and sequestration in NWL in response to changing management and climate. As the effects of climate change further stress ecosystems across Oregon, we will need comprehensive process-based models which incorporate anthropogenic land-use trends, natural disturbances, and climate change projections are needed to better understand how NWL in Oregon may serve as a carbon sink into the future.

Oregon's farmlands, ranches, and forests can't wait. It is imperative Oregon act quickly to scale up NWL carbon sequestration and storage activity: project development will take time and some NWL strategies take years to mature and reach their full carbon sequestration and storage potential. Decisive action now to take the foundational steps necessary to create structure and direction for this work will ensure these strategies make timely and important contributions. Farmers, ranchers, and foresters are already seeing their narrow profit margins squeezed by extreme temperatures, wildfire, drought, and flooding. It's time to invest in supporting healthier soils, forests, wetlands, and coastal areas to increase net earnings, improve fish and wildlife habitats, and provide flood protection while sequestering and storing carbon.

As landowners and managers ourselves, we recognize the need to adapt our practices to help mitigate and prepare for changing conditions. We are actively assessing how to leverage existing and emerging science to do so. The steps proposed in SB 1534 will support and amplify statewide efforts to evolve practices on Oregon's natural and working lands that make those lands healthier and more resilient, to the benefit of those who steward them and all of Oregon.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important legislation. We strongly urge your support of SB 1534 by adopting the -2 amendment and moving this bill forward.

ⁱ Graves RA, Haugo RD, Holz A, Nielsen-Pincus M, Jones A, Kellogg B, et al. 2020. Potential greenhouse gas reductions from Natural Climate Solutions in Oregon, USA. PLoS One. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0230424

ⁱⁱ IPCC, 2019: Climate Change and Land: an IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems [P.R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.-O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley, K. Kissick, M. Belkacemi, J. Malley, (eds.)]. p. 21 <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/11/SRCCL-Full-Report-Compiled-191128.pdf>