

Dear Chair Helm and Committee Members,

I support this bill and I urge you to advance this bill out of committee to the full legislature. Below are some of the discussion points that were shared with me to describe the importance of passing this legislation.

- I. Managing for habitat on land in agriculture or forestry deferral puts landowners at risk of losing those deferrals and being assessed back taxes. Once they realize this, many landowners with ag or forest deferrals decline to manage for habitat. They can't afford or justify the loss of their existing tax deferral.
 - A. Managing for habitat can be expensive and generally does not significantly affect property value.
 - B. There may be grants to cover restoration cost, but they rarely cover ongoing maintenance.
 - C. Public benefit for strategy habitats is high while private benefit is low, in other words, landowners must find personal value in habitat work because it doesn't generate monetary value for them.
 - D. The public benefits from their work in terms of returns for wildlife, fire resilience, and the iconic beauty of these landscapes.

- II. WHCMP, which can solve the issue with loss of deferrals for transitioning to managing for habitat, has been unavailable to new enrollees in ODFW's North Willamette Watershed District for the past five years, and it's over that time frame that a coalition of 8 Oregon SWCDs, ODFW, and regional partners have been working to make it available again.

- III. WHCMP is important to preserving and restoring Oregon Conservation Strategy Habitats
 - A. Significant portions of remaining critical habitats reside on private lands
 - B. Much of the remaining habitat is at threat of loss to conversion or development
 - C. Because of these threats, Clackamas SWCD, other SWCDs, Regional partnerships, state, and federal agencies are actively prioritizing protection of OCS habitats and are investing time and resources for restoration, but we are running into a significant financial barrier for many landowners who are willing to restore or protect habitat but may lose existing tax deferrals

- IV. WHCMP is the right tool that can solve the deferral issue and offset the cost of maintenance.
 - A. It starts to balance the public/private benefit disparity
 - B. It is not grant dependent
 - C. Counties have shown that they want this tool and see the value in it for maintaining the character of their open lands and for climate mitigation
 - D. It provides landowners the flexibility to manage their land for critical habitats, which we all benefit from.

- V. ODFW believes House Bill 2527 will resolve the capacity problems that have plagued the program.
 - A. Monitoring is time intensive, and giving ODFW discretion on when to monitor a property will free up time for new enrollments.
 - B. Prioritizing projects based on Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats would increase impact for the capacity expended and simplifying the administration of the program also enables more enrollments to occur.
 - C. These changes bring habitat deferrals in line with the requirements for farm and agricultural deferral programs.
 - D. SWCDs, partners, and other qualified entities can provide the technical advice needed to help enrolled and prospective enrollees be successful.

There is demand for these programs from landowners, and there are positive social, economic, and ecologic outcomes that can be gained from WHCMP. If we can work with ODFW to solve the administrative hurdles to delivering the program, there are lands across the state that are ready to enroll to achieve the goals of the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

Sincerely,

Brandon Crawford