

Good afternoon,

My name is Linda Tarr and I volunteer with the Port Orford Watershed Council. Thank you all for your public service and for considering this bill.

The City of Port Orford struggles to provide adequate drinking water, both in the summer months, which are typically dry, and when demand is highest, and in the winter months, when heavy storms increase the sediment in our reservoir, making the treatment of raw water impossible for days at a time. Keeping intact forest in our watershed, which naturally acts as both sponge and filter, is crucial. The recent years of increased storm intensity and summer drought conditions make it clear that investing in land acquisition to protect forested land for drinking water is ever more important.

We are over two years into a project to purchase 160 acres of forested land that would otherwise have been intensively harvested in an area identified by DEQ as vulnerable to erosion, very near our drinking water uptake.

In that process, hundreds of volunteer hours, and the help of The Conservation Fund, acting as a bridge buyer, has brought us into the last stage of applying for funding through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, which is a loan which makes it possible for the City of Port Orford to purchase this land and manage it to protect drinking water. This is a significant financial commitment by our underfunded City.

However, there are numerous other parcels in our drinking watershed which also need protection. Our City government lacks the budget and administrative capacity to take on those projects.

I believe the proposed bill could be very helpful.

I am encouraged to see there is funding for technical assistance.

I am encouraged to see that the use of Conservation Easements is eligible for funding. In a small coastal watershed like the North Fork of Hubbard Creek, keeping healthy forest on parcels that already have a house on them is crucial. Several of the landowners in our watershed would like to sell or even donate a Conservation Easement to protect the forest in perpetuity. But a funded endowment to insure ongoing stewardship, guided by our forest management plan, is a critical need, to be able to use conservation easements. I would recommend that stewardship endowments of Conservation easements, using the expertise of non-profit land trusts be eligible for this funding.

Something that must be addressed is the fact that the real estate business moves much faster than government funding. Bridge buyers such as The Conservation Fund can help. Also, some landowners might be willing to hold land for a reasonable amount of time while public funding is found. But the details of the bureaucratic mechanism for public funding needs to be designed for this reality.

Also, making sure that drinking water providers are aware of a property being available for sale, and being able to be proactive to bring about a sale to protect drinking water is a critical link in the chain. Property owners should have reasonable assurance that sale to a government entity can happen without undue additional hardship. I hope that these details can be considered in the process that will evolve from the appropriation of this funding.

Having seen the efforts and investments that are necessary when forest was removed from parts of our watershed, it is clear that protecting drinking water through land acquisition is one of the most efficient uses of taxpayer money to protect the health and vitality of our community.

Thank you.