

Senate Committee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

February 16th, 2023

Re: Oregon Wild testimony in support of SB 530

Dear Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Girod, and members of the committee,

I very much appreciate the time you're taking to consider the numerous benefits a bill like SB 530 can bring to Oregon's forests, farms, and waters, and the people and communities that depend on them. Natural climate solutions really are an untapped resource here in Oregon. Our state has dedicated a lot of time and resources towards addressing the threat of climate change, however, when it comes to using nature to sequester carbon and combat impacts we are behind the curve.

These are not technologies we need to invent, they are common sense practices that need additional support to reach their full potential. As much as we don't want to face the reality of climate change impacts, we can expect ice storms, heat domes, and drought to be the new normal. How we invest and plan now will determine what exactly that new normal looks like for future generations. By making climate-smart investments now, we can save the state billions in avoided damages in the future and ensure our forests, farms, and rangelands thrive.

Natural climate solutions also have the ability to ensure equitable environmental outcomes and more resilient communities. This legislation will provide additional resources for communities already experiencing the impacts of climate change firsthand. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the effects of climate change disproportionately fall on "underserved communities who are least able to prepare for, and recover from drought, heat waves, poor air quality, flooding, and other impacts." Providing additional resources for these communities should be a top priority for state legislators. In Oregon, natural climate solutions can provide simple, low-cost opportunities for:

- Reducing heat island effects;
- Improving air quality;
- Improving flood control;
- Improving soil health and productivity;
- Improving wildfire resilience and community protection; and
- Improving drought resilience and response.

Congress and the Biden administration have fully recognized this, as evidenced by recently passed federal legislation that invests billions of dollars in natural climate solutions.

The Forest Legacy Program¹ offers one example of this type of investment. The program aims to protect environmentally important forestlands threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. It's an example of a federal program that requires 25% match funds from states, and SB 530 is exactly the type of legislation that can provide these state match dollars. This program is funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was permanently authorized in the 2020 Great American Outdoors Act. The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act set aside an additional \$700 million to be spent prior to September 2031, with a special focus on climate resiliency and underserved communities. Unless Oregon passes SB 530 and better positions the state to access and accept these federal dollars, the state will be missing out on significant financial resources.

And this is just one example. There are numerous other federal programs out there with a lot of money on the table, including:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)² which provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and forest landowners for
 - Conserved ground and surface water;
 - Increased soil health;
 - Improved or created wildlife habitat;
 - Mitigation against drought and increasing weather volatility; and
 - Improved carbon sequestration and reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)³ which is the largest conservation program in the United States. Thousands of people voluntarily enroll in the program because it helps them enhance natural resources and improve their business operation. Some of these benefits include:
 - Enhanced resiliency to weather and market volatility;
 - Decreased need for agricultural inputs; and
 - Improved wildlife habitat conditions

Other relevant provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act include:

Title II - Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

Subtitle B - Conservation

- **Sec. 21001:** Additional agricultural conservation investments. \$19.85 billion (Environmental Quality Incentives Program – \$8.45 billion, Regional Conservation Partnership Program – \$6.75 billion, Conservation Stewardship

¹ ODF <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/board/documents/cff/20221013-cff-presentation.pdf>

² USDA <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/eqip-environmental-quality-incentives>

³ USDA <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/csp-conservation-stewardship-program>

Program – \$3.25 billion, Agriculture Conservation Easement Program – \$1.4 billion): Provides funds to farmers that utilize climate stewardship practices such as improving soil carbon, reducing methane emissions from ruminants

- **Sec. 21002:** Conservation technical assistance. \$1.3 billion: Provides conservation technical assistance through the Natural Resources Conservation Service and funds a carbon sequestration and GHG emissions quantification program through the NRCS

Subtitle D - Forestry

- **Sec. 23002:** Competitive grants for non-federal forest landowners. \$0.55 billion: Competitive grant programs and direct payments for private forest owners to invest in climate mitigation/forest resilience
- **Sec. 23003:** State and private forestry conservation programs. \$2.2 billion: \$1.5 billion in Grants to States through the Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program to acquire land, with priority given for land with high carbon sequestration potential - \$0.7 billion in grants to state agencies, local government entities, tribes, or nonprofits through the Forest Legacy Program for tree planting, prioritizing underserved populations

Title IV - Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

- **Sec. 40001:** Investing in coastal communities and climate resilience. \$2.6 billion: Funds to NOAA to provide grants, cooperative agreements, or technical assistance for conservation, restoration, and protection of coastal habitats and resources, as well as assistance to coastal communities to prepare for extreme storms

Title V - Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

Subtitle B—Natural Resources

- **Sec. 50233:** Drought Mitigation in the Reclamation States. \$4 billion - for water conservation, drought prevention, and habitat restoration (due to drought) in the reclamation states (States west of the Mississippi River), with priority given to the Colorado River Basin.

Title VIII — Committee On Indian Affairs

- **Sec. 80001:** Tribal climate resilience. \$0.235 billion - Programs aimed at building resilience across Tribal governments

Relevant IJA provision: PROTECT program supports states' efforts to improve the resiliency of transportation infrastructure. Funds from the program are split into \$7.3 billion of formula funding and \$1.4 billion of competitive set-aside grants over five years for resilience improvements at the state and municipal levels. Funding under this program can be used to improve the resiliency of natural infrastructure such as wetlands, flood plains, and aquatic ecosystems.

By voting yes on SB 530, you are opening the door to a whole new set of solutions that can benefit all of Oregon.

Sincerely,

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