



## Wallowa Land Trust

March 14, 2023

House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water Committee

RE: Support for HB 3366 – Full Funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Dear Chair Helm and Committee Members,

My name is Kathleen Ackley and I am the executive director of Wallowa Land Trust. Our mission is to protect the rural nature of Wallowa County by working cooperatively with private landowners, Indigenous people, local communities and governmental entities to conserve land. We use voluntary, non-regulatory tools to protect the places we love in our corner of NE Oregon: natural areas, wildlife habitat, open spaces and working lands.

**I am writing today in support of HB 3366, a bipartisan bill that would fully fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program at the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB).** HB 3366 would help farmers and ranchers protect their land from fragmentation and development, while keeping it in production and benefiting local economies and communities. HB 3366 includes \$10 million in grants and \$800,000 in administration funding requested by OWEB for the 2023-2025 biennium.

NE Oregon, and particularly Wallowa County, has seen a tremendous growth in tourism and increased fragmentation of our farms and ranches. As a rural community, farming, ranching and natural resources have long been the backbone of our economy. Thriving farms and ranches are the heart of our local community and culture. Unfortunately, we have seen a startling turnover of working lands, from once actively producing farms and ranches to fragmented hobby farms with little added value to our community. Our organization is regularly contacted by farmers and ranchers looking for the means to keep their farms intact. For many, the land has been in the family for multiple generations and they are struggling to raise the capital to continue to invest in their operations. More funds can be earned by simply parceling off the land for development. For some, there is no choice as they have aging parents to care for, medical debt and minimal liquidity. Agricultural Land Easements are a tremendous tool to keep farms and ranches intact and supporting our economy. By supporting HB 3366, we are leveraging significant federal dollars to keep our farms and ranches in production, protect wildlife habitat and support rural communities like ours.

*Working to protect the rural nature of Wallowa County*

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HB 3366 will provide a sustainable source of state matching funds to protect our agricultural and ranch land across Oregon, especially here in Wallowa County. We hope that Chair Helm and the committee members will support this bill and we appreciate the opportunity to testify.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathleen", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Kathleen Ackley, Executive Director

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