



COALITION OF OREGON LAND TRUSTS

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April 20, 2023

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

RE: SB 5539 and SB 5540, Support for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board 2023-2025 Budget

Co-Chairs Dembrow, Representative Pham, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) 2023-2025 budget. The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) is a network of 32 organizations working to protect Oregon's natural world - our water, wildlife, and open spaces - for all people, forever. Together, our statewide community of land trusts, soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), and conservation organizations have protected more than 370,000 acres of land.

Land trusts and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) share a common purpose to protect and restore habitat in a manner consistent with community needs and local economies. Land trusts and OWEB are partners, working together to advance the goals of the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

This is particularly true when it comes to land acquisition. Since the inception of OWEB, the members of COLT have been the Agency's primary partner in acquiring and protecting habitat across the State. OWEB uses lottery dollars through Measure 76 to provide the only dedicated source of statewide funding for habitat protection in Oregon.

When considering OWEB's 2023-2025 Budget, COLT is asking that this Committee support the following three priorities:



24 MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS: Blue Mountain Land Trust • Center for Natural Lands Management • Columbia Land Trust
Deschutes Land Trust • Ducks Unlimited • Forest Park Conservancy • Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust
Greenbelt Land Trust • Klamath Lake Land Trust • Lower Nehalem Community Trust • McKenzie River Trust
North Coast Land Conservancy • Northwest Rangeland Trust • Oregon Agricultural Trust • Oregon Desert Land Trust
Pacific Forest Trust • Southern Oregon Land Conservancy • The Conservation Fund • The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
The Trust for Public Land • The Wetlands Conservancy • Wallowa Land Trust • Western Rivers Conservancy • Wild Rivers Land Trust

8 ASSOCIATE MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS: Black Oregon Land Trust • Cerro Gordo Land Conservancy • Clackamas Soil & Water
Conservation District • East Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District • Helvetia Community Association
Tualatin Soil & Water Conservation District • View the Future • Yamhill Soil & Water Conservation District

#1- \$10.8M to continue the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (HB 3366)

We ask you to support the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP), created by the Legislature in 2017 to protect our most important farm and ranch lands from fragmentation and conversion. Last year the legislature allocated \$5 million to the OAHP, leveraging a record federal investment of \$6.7 million in agricultural easement funding for Oregon. Because of this important program, we are moving forward with seven agricultural land protection projects this year that include a legacy ranch at the mouth of the Elk River on the South Coast, a working rangeland habitat that borders the growing community of Prineville, and a working ranch that protects some of our best sage grouse habitat in Southeast Oregon.

OAHP is up and running as a program in OWEB and it's working. The Agency Requested Budget (ARB) included a request for \$10.8M through POPS 115 and 215 to continue the program into the next biennium, however this funding was not included in the Governor's budget. *On behalf of land trusts, agricultural land owners, industry groups and conservation organizations, we ask that you provide OWEB with the \$10.8M needed for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program.* This funding request is currently before the Ways and Means committee in **HB 3366** that passed unanimously out of the House Agriculture Committee.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage program funds working land conservation easements, conservation management planning, succession planning, and technical assistance. OAHP provides our community with a statewide source of funding that protects our agricultural and ranchland from development while keeping it in production, supporting rural economies with dollars that recirculate in communities, and paying producers for practices that conserve natural resources.

The program is now staffed and up and running within OWEB. On March 16th, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Commission met and approved the first slate of grants for seven conservation easement projects that protect a variety of farm and ranch types in geographies across the state. COLT is proud to have been a part of getting this program off the ground, and we are excited to see its impact in our state.

With success underway, we cannot walk away from funding this program now. Our farmers and ranchers are at the heart of Oregon's economy, and our working lands are facing constant pressures from low-density development and fragmentation. In addition, we have to invest in the next generation of producers- 64% of our working lands (10.45 million acres) will change hands in the next 20 years and 80% of Oregon farmers and ranchers do not currently have a succession plan in place for that transition. ¹

We respectfully request that this committee **provide \$10.8 M for OAHP for the 2023-2025 biennium as proposed in the OWEB Agency Requested Budget (ARB).** This program has enjoyed significant bipartisan support, leveraging federal dollars, keeping working lands working, and supporting rural economies and businesses.

¹ Horst, M. (2019). Changes in farmland ownership in Oregon, USA. *Land* 8 (39).
https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/usp_fac/234/



#2- Support OWEB staff capacity

For the upcoming biennium, we support OWEB's request for staff capacity needed to implement the core programs of Measure 76 and the influx of new programs the Agency manages. In the past biennium, OWEB's budget grew from **\$125 million** with 41 authorized positions (19-21 actuals) to a 21-23 budget of **\$225 million, almost double, with only five more positions added (46 FTE)**. This growth is from a portfolio of new programs including post-wildfire recovery grants, drought resilience, OAHP and water acquisition grants.

COLT supports the ARB's request for additional staff positions, in particular POPs 101 (Special Programs Manager for drought, fire and restoration in the Klamath) and POP 102 (Acquisition Manager) - these two positions build out organizational structure. The Acquisition Manager role provides much needed support for the growing portfolio of land acquisition projects that land trusts need to provide climate resilience and the permanent protection of fish and wildlife habitat.

#3- Wildlife recovery funding reallocation:

The Oregon Wildfires of 2020 had devastating and far-reaching impacts on our state's natural resources infrastructure, with over a million acres of burn area, including hundreds of thousands of acres in watersheds crucial to drinking water and fish and wildlife. Much progress has been made already by local partners in this on-the ground natural resources restoration work funded and administered through OWEB, but implementation of floodplain/riparian restoration and land acquisition remains ongoing and some unspent balances in this biennial budget remain from the wildfire recovery funds allocated in the 2021 legislative session. We urge the legislature to reallocate these unspent balances to OWEB's 2023-2025 Budget.

The work funded through OWEB is critical to protecting and restoring watersheds and habitat in Oregon. Since 2000, OWEB has funded over 100 land acquisition projects that permanently protected more than 90,000 acres of habitat. Our land trust community is proud to be a partner in this important work and we look forward to continuing to work together to deliver results that improve our community resilience, protect our working lands, and conserve our most treasured places.

Thank you for the time and opportunity to testify in support of the OWEB budget and these important programs.

Sincerely,



Kelley Beamer
Executive Director
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

