



April 20, 2023

To: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources

From: Pacific Forest Trust

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

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

My name is Laurie Wayburn, and I'm the President of the Pacific Forest Trust, a nonprofit land trusts that conserves private working forests. With offices in Portland and Ashland, PFT has conserved over 20,000 acres and manages 8,300 acres of forest in the state.

I am writing to express my strong support for SB 5539, which will provide essential funding for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board over the next biennium. OWEB provides critical services to the state and all Oregonians by protecting its watersheds and irreplaceable wildlife heritage while also enabling Oregon's natural and working lands to provide critical climate solutions. I especially want to underscore our support for the agency's requests for additional staff capacity and funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program as specified in POPs 115 and 215. The additional funding will greatly leverage new federal funding from both the NRCS and USFWS.

We are grateful to have had an excellent working relationship with OWEB for over 20 years, during which we've been able to collaborate on pioneering the conservation of private working forests. Most recently, we collaborated with OWEB to acquire and protect eleven-hundred-acres on the Siskiyou Crest above Ashland to establish the Mount Ashland Demonstration Forest.

Conservation easements and fee acquisition projects are extremely successful at conserving and restoring our ecosystems across fragmented ownership patterns of public and private lands. Our work across the Siskiyou Crest, culminating last year in the Mt. Ashland Forest project is a great example. With OWEB's support we have been able to work with private landowners to provide protected connected habitat and conserve well managed forests linking tens of thousands of acres from the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument to the Rogue Siskiyou National Forest. This protects and stewards some of the most biodiverse forests in Oregon — and the world.

The Mt Ashland Demonstration Forest project is a key part of that. With OWEB's support we are restoring and managing the forest, meadows, wetlands, and streams to be more resilient to

drought and wildfires. Both our OWEB funded easements with private landowners and our fee acquisition with this forest provide sustainable jobs, protect and restore habitats, reduce risk, and sustain essential ecosystem services for generations to come.

OWEB's acquisition programs help keep Oregon's forest landscapes intact and working, protecting countless public benefits from clean water to wildlife habitat to carbon sequestration and climate adaptation, and more. Properties may have boundaries, but forests—along with the water and wildlife that run through them—do not.

PFT's work with OWEB, in both its conservation easement and fee acquisition programs illustrate how this relatively small investment leverages huge gains for Oregon, all while underpinning sustainable resource economies.

We respectfully request that this committee provide \$10.8M for OAHP for the 2023-2025 biennium as proposed in the OWEB Agency Requested Budget (ARB) and in HB 3366. Your return on this investment will be phenomenal.

Thank you,

Laurie A. Wayburn
President
The Pacific Forest Trust