



COALITION OF OREGON LAND TRUSTS

2540 NE MLK JR BLVD, PORTLAND, OR 97212 • 503-719-4732 • OREGONLANDTRUSTS.ORG

February 6, 2024

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

From: The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

RE: Support for H.B. 4060 – Funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program

Chair Helm and Committee Members:

It is a pleasure to testify in strong support of H.B. 4060, a bill that would fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program for the remainder of the 2023-2025 biennium. We would like to offer our continued thanks to the House Agriculture Committee for all of the work you have done to support OAHF thus far.

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) and our partners have worked for more than 6 years to create and fund the OAHF, a program dedicated to protecting farm and ranch land, keeping it in production, and enhancing its natural resource values. COLT is a network of 31 member organizations working in Oregon to protect our natural world - our water, wildlife, and open spaces - for all people, forever. Together, our statewide community of land trusts has protected more than 290,000 acres of land, including agricultural and rangeland.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program was created by the Legislature in 2017 to protect our most important farm and ranch lands from fragmentation and conversion. In 2022, the legislature allocated \$5 million to the OAHF, leveraging a record federal investment of \$6.7 million in agricultural easement funding for Oregon through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Because of this funding, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) approved seven agricultural land protection projects (12,480 acres) last April that include a legacy ranch at the mouth of the Elk River on the South Coast, working rangeland habitat that borders the growing



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

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 program helps our state leverage unprecedented levels of federal funding through the Inflation Reduction Act, and keeps us competitive with the 27 other states in the country that operate a state matching fund for agricultural conservation. Despite its bipartisan support, OAHP did not receive additional grant funding in the 2023 legislative session, **jeopardizing more than \$7 million already committed to Oregon projects through the NRCS**. Without additional funding in 2024 and in the next biennium budget, these funds will be returned to the federal government and reallocated to other states.

On behalf of land trusts, agricultural land owners, industry groups and conservation organizations, we ask that you support H.B. 4060 to provide \$10.8M needed for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program.

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 thank this Committee for the hard work to-date to support OAHP, and for your support for H.B. 4060. This program has enjoyed significant bipartisan support, leveraging federal dollars, keeping working lands working, and supporting rural economies and businesses.

Sincerely,



Amanda Martino
Executive Director, Blue Mountain Land Trust
Board President, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT)

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

