



COALITION OF OREGON LAND TRUSTS

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January 21, 2025

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

From: The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

RE: Support for H.B. 3131 – Funding the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program in the 2025-2027 Biennium

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure to testify in strong support of H.B. 3131, a bill that would fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) for the 2025-2027 biennium. We would like to offer our continued thanks to the House Agriculture Committee for all of the work you have done to support OAHP thus far.

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) and our partners have worked for more than 8 years to create and fund the OAHP, 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 318,000 acres of land, including agricultural and ranchland.

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) is a bipartisan program created in 2017 by conservation and agricultural groups to prevent the fragmentation of Oregon's working lands while protecting natural resources values. OAHP includes 4 grants programs: working lands conservation easements, conservation management plans, and funding for technical assistance and farm transfer planning.

OAHP is up and running as a program in OWEB and it's working. The first appropriation of \$5 million in 2022 leveraged \$6.7 million from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and protected over 5,000 acres of working lands. The second grant cycle from the 2024



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 • Willowa 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

legislative short session (\$5.161 million) concluded in June 2024. Ten applications were received requesting over \$8 million in funding. The OWEB Board will decide which applications to fund at their upcoming January Board Meeting, happening next week. COLT would be happy to update this Committee with the funding outcomes from this recent grant cycle.

To prepare for the 2025 legislative session, our Coalition conducted a survey of land trusts to understand the program pipeline and demand for the biennium. We found more than 25 potential conservation easements projects in the pipeline, which would protect over 38,000 acres of working lands and leverage \$32.5 million in federal funds from NRCS. **But we need sustained state investment to secure these funds.**

H.B. 3131 would provide \$17.3 million for OAHP over the biennium, which includes the funding needed for conservation easement grants, additional funds for the other grant programs under OAHP, and funding for OWEB's administration of the program. Funding for OAHP was also included in the Governor's Requested Budget at \$2 million, but this investment is far below the demonstrated program need.

On behalf of land trusts, agricultural landowners, industry groups and conservation organizations, we ask that you support H.B. 3131 to provide \$17.3M 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. We thank this Committee for the hard work to-date to support OAHP, and for your support for H.B. 3131. This program has enjoyed significant bipartisan support, leveraging federal dollars, keeping working lands working, and supporting rural economies and businesses.

Sincerely,



Joe Buttafuoco
Executive Director
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT)

