



February 10, 2025

Senate Committee on Housing and Development
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: SB 503 – Oppose

Dear Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Development:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 503.

Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is a land use and conservation advocacy organization that for more than 35 years, has protected Central Oregon’s farm and forest lands, rivers and springs, fish and wildlife, and its vibrant communities. We work to conserve the region’s ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and working rural lands balanced with a responsible, sustainable approach to planning and fostering thriving communities.

LandWatch opposes SB 503. This bill would amend ORS 215.213 and 215.283 by expanding the allowable uses on EFU-zoned land to include the temporary use of a recreational vehicle by “individuals providing security to protect a farm use.”

Fundamental to Oregon’s land use planning program is the protection of millions of acres of farmland through exclusive farm use (EFU) zoning. Indeed, farmland protection is enshrined in Goal 3 of the statewide land use planning system. Goal 3 is intended to ensure that our state’s limited supply of farmland is maintained for agricultural use. And yet, Oregon farmland remains under constant pressure.

While urban expansion and rural rezoning continue to take land out of farm use, the proliferation of the number and types of non-farm uses allowed on EFU allow may pose an even greater threat Oregon agriculture. Currently, more than 60 nonfarm uses are permitted on EFU, from personal-use airports to commercial events. The negative impacts that these nonfarm uses can have on agriculture are significant, including increased traffic, difficulty moving farm equipment, the obligation to manage neighbor complaints, and spikes in land valuation due to speculative investment. Potentially more than doubling the number of dwellings on farmland for five months out of the year, as SB 503 proposes to allow, would make conducting agricultural operations more difficult for Oregon’s farmers, not easier and more secure.

What is more, SB 503 is an unnecessary expansion of uses allowed on EFU. Existing state law already allows for a wide variety of dwellings on farmland that could be used to house





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“individuals providing security,” including non-farm dwellings, accessory farm dwellings, relative help dwellings, and temporary hardship dwellings. Unlike SB 503, however, each of those existing types of dwellings allowed on EFU land require some sort of showing of need or criteria justifying the existence of the development. SB 503 carries with it no such requirement. What does it mean to “provide security” for a farm use? Are the threats to farm equipment and crops so substantial as to warrant new legislation? Will temporary RVs on farmland be prone to being used for reasons other than providing security for a crop? These questions are unanswered and as a result, SB 503 runs counter to Oregon’s longstanding state policy that “substantially limits” nonfarm uses on farmland. ORS 215.243(4).

Finally, protecting farmland provides many co-benefits beyond facilitating Oregon’s robust farm economy. Many of the properties where this bill would allow additional development are home to resources protected under Statewide Planning Goal 5. Goal 5 aims to conserve natural resources, wildlife habitat, scenic and historic areas, open spaces, and cultural resources. Allowing a substantial increase in human activity on farmland via SB 503 will have profound negative impacts on a host of Goal 5-protected resources across the state. For example, Goal 5 protects wildlife habitat through local land regulations that limit conflicting uses. In Central Oregon, excessive rural development is a primary cause of the rapidly declining population of mule deer, an iconic and beloved big game species of the high desert. Further degradation of vital mule deer habitat is just one of the many additional negative impacts that passage of SB 503 would contribute to.

For the reasons above, LandWatch respectfully requests this Committee not pass SB 503 out of committee.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

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Central Oregon LandWatch



WE DEFEND AND PLAN FOR CENTRAL OREGON'S LIVABLE FUTURE