

Chair Jama, Vice-chair Bonham, and Committee members,

My name is Judi Sanders, and I am the Vice President and Native Plant Appreciation Month Coordinator for the Native Plant Society of Oregon, a nonprofit dedicated to the enjoyment, conservation and study of Oregon's native plants and habitats. Our organization, which has over 60 years of history and 11 chapters across the state, strongly supports **SB 547**, a **bipartisan** bill that would establish April as Oregon's **Native Plant Appreciation Month**.

Native plants offer a wide array of benefits—aesthetic, economic, ecological, environmental, and cultural heritage—that contribute to Oregon's rich biodiversity and quality of life.

We live in a remarkable place, where our native plants are integral to the beauty and ecological health of our environment. With over 3,400 native vascular plants—from towering Sitka Spruce and the iconic Douglas Fir, to the moderately sized Western Azalea and Oregon Grape and to the tiny fairy slipper and twayblade orchids—Oregon is home to a rich diversity of plants found across all 36 counties. For example, in **Senator Jama's district**, you'll find the Western Waterleaf, in **Senator Bonham's**, the Magenta Paintbrush, in **Senator Thatcher's**, the Douglas Spiraea, in **Senator Manning's**, the Seaside Lotus, and in **Senator Golden's**, the Glacier Lily, and many more in each district as these are just a few examples of the plant life that defines Oregon. We are proud to have the **fifth-largest number of native plant species in the U.S.** (Stein, B.A. and Gravuer, K. 2008. *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Role of Plants in State Wildlife Action Plans*. Arlington, Virginia: NatureServe)., including 120 species endemic to and grow only in Oregon, such as the Peacock Larkspur and Howell's Mariposa Lily.¹

Beyond aesthetics, **consider the economic impact of our native plants**: Oregon's timber industry, built upon exemplary native species like Douglas Fir and Western Hemlock (https://www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr997.pdf), leads the nation in softwood lumber and plywood production and the total number of engineered wood product manufacturing facilities. https://site.oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/OFRI_2023ForestFacts_WebFinal.pdf. Beyond timber, native plants support vital sectors like horticulture and construction.

On the ecological front, **native plants provide essential services** that sustain life—on land and in water. They offer shelter, food, and habitat for wildlife, help preserve biodiversity, and promote the resilience of ecosystems. Native plants often have vigorous root systems that reduce water runoff, prevent soil erosion, reduce flooding and support healthy watersheds. Crucially, they achieve this while requiring fewer pesticides, fertilizers, and less water than non-native species, making them a critical component of sustainable land management.

Environmental benefits are also significant. Native plants capture carbon and release oxygen, making them vital in addressing climate change—one of the most pressing challenges of our time. Oregon's forests, predominantly composed of native trees, play a crucial role in carbon

¹ Linda Hardison, director Oregon Flora, private communication about update of endemic species number, 2/1/25. Unless otherwise noted, all plant species numbers are from Oregon Flora.

sequestration and mitigating environmental challenges as part of Oregon's official climate change mitigation strategies.

Culturally, native plants are central to Oregon's heritage. For thousands of years, Oregon's Indigenous peoples relied on native plants for food, medicine, shelter, tools, and ceremonial purposes. This enduring connection is reflected in our state symbols—**Oregon Grape** as our state flower (designated in 1899) and **Douglas Fir** as our state tree (designated in 1939) which is still featured on our license plates today.

While the benefits of native plants are clear, there are threats to our native plants. Not all wild plants in Oregon are native. We face challenges with **over 1,300 wild non-native plants**, including over **150 invasive species** that threaten our ecosystems. Some of these invasive species—such as noxious weeds—compete with native plants, degrade habitats, interfere with agriculture and can lead to soil erosion and wildfires (Oregon Department of Agriculture <https://tinyurl.com/2cfebbdtd>). In addition, the Oregon Biodiversity Information Center ranks 633 of Oregon's native vascular plant species as uncommon, threatened, vulnerable, imperiled or critically imperiled in Oregon (<https://tinyurl.com/2wunsdub>). They need our help and care.

This is where SB 547 comes in. By establishing **Native Plant Appreciation Month**, we can help increase public awareness and encourage the conservation and restoration of native plants throughout Oregon. This month-long celebration would:

1. Encourage schools, communities, and individuals to engage in activities that promote the appreciation, conservation, preservation and restoration of native plants.
2. Inspire the use of native plants in gardens and landscaping.
3. Promote local habitat restoration by planting native plants and removing invasive species.
4. Support programs like the **Backyard Habitat Certification Program**, which encourages homeowners to plant native species and create wildlife-friendly spaces.
5. Raise awareness through community science projects, such as documenting native plants on **iNaturalist**.
6. Support watershed councils and their restoration projects and other similar projects.
7. Support public and private projects to protect, conserve, and restore our imperiled native plant species.
8. Encourage people to explore and enjoy Oregon's native plants in our wild lands.
9. Encourage learning about Oregon history and the first foods and stewardship practices of our Indigenous peoples.
10. Promote more native plants in the nursery and horticultural industries to make more plants available to the general public.
11. Encourage further research into native plants and their role in our ecosystems.

The Native Plant Society of Oregon (NPSO) has been celebrating Native Plant Appreciation since 2005, initially in a weeklong celebration and more recently, for the entire month of April. In 2023, the **Portland Garden Club** and the **Garden Club of America** reached out to us to help make this month permanent through legislation, NPSO agreed, NPSO member Luci Moody reached to her senator to sponsor the bill. We are proud to have the support of many organizations, and have **Senators Janeen Sollman** and **Sara Gelsner Blouin**, as chief sponsors

this bill as well as Senators **Broadman, Campos, Lieber, Meek, Reynolds, Weber,** and **Representatives McLain and Nathanson** as regular sponsors,

Some other states have also legislated a native plant month; legislation similar to SB 547 **passed unanimously in California in 2023**. By passing **SB 547**, you will be taking a significant step in promoting a healthier, more sustainable Oregon. I, along with the backing of many dedicated organizations, respectfully ask you to pass **SB 547** and make April **Oregon's Native Plant Appreciation Month**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Judi Sanders
Vice-President and Native Plant Appreciation Month Coordinator
Native Plant Society of Oregon

Additional Resources:

- [Oregon Forestry Facts](#)
 - [USDA Forest Service – Native Plant Gardening](#)
 - [BLM – Native Plant Communities](#)
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