



Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District

625 SE Salmon Ave, Ste 6 Redmond, OR 97756
(541) 699-3170 www.jeffswcd.org

February 21, 2025

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy and members of the Joint Subcommittee On Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee:

I'm writing on behalf of the Jefferson County SWCD to express our strong support for \$5M in OWEB's budget for renewal of the Natural and Working Lands Fund, which provides incentives and technical support to help landowners and land managers adopt practices that support natural climate solutions on Oregon's natural and working lands.

Our mission to "pursue natural resource stewardship through collaboration, assessment, and project implementation" will help meet our vision that "resource management in Jefferson County benefits both watershed health and economic viability."

Jefferson County consists of 1800 square miles and approximately 25,000 people in Central Oregon. Approximately 55 percent of the land is privately owned; the remaining is evenly split between federal lands and those managed by the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon.

Jefferson County is one of the most ethnically diverse counties in Oregon; 18% of residents are American Indian and 20% are Hispanic or Latino. It is also one of the poorest counties, with a 15% poverty rate and 6.1% unemployment rate. The United States Department of Agriculture considers the City of Madras and the Reservation as 'Distressed' or 'Disadvantaged' Communities.

Agriculture is vital to the economy and sociocultural fabric of Jefferson County. Farms and ranches are primarily multi-generational family operations; the oldest are operated by fifth or sixth generation farmers, and most have at least three generations. Many Jefferson County farmers are innovators and early adopters of new technologies. The area is known for production of high value specialty and seed crops on irrigated cropland, and a high level of production expertise by growers and supporting industry. However, due to climate changes and 100-year old water law, Jefferson County farmers and ranchers are in the midst of a crippling drought that is devastating our agricultural economy. In 2023, the SWCD facilitated a diverse group of people to develop a long-range plan to thrive despite water scarcity ([Managing for Drought - Jefferson County Soil and Water Conservation District \(jeffswcd.org\)](#)). This funding can help!

Natural Climate Solutions have economic, social, and health benefits to communities. Their aims are:

- remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it in our natural and working lands,
- to help increase ecosystem resilience,
- maintain or increase human well-being.



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Additional benefits include managing wildfire risk, improved water filtration and storage, cooler water temperatures, maintaining biodiversity, providing pollinator habitat, soil health, reducing flood damage, and more.

Natural climate solutions take time to establish and will cost more to build in the future. The sooner they are implemented, the more they can help lessen the magnitude of disturbance events and potentially reduce future damages and costs. We need to maintain the momentum of this young program.

We urge your support for the inclusion of the \$5M investment of the NWL Fund in OWEB's budget for the 2025-2027 biennium.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Ellen L. Hammond'.

Ellen Hammond, Conservation Specialist