



COALITION OF OREGON LAND TRUSTS

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February 24th, 2025

To: Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT)

RE: H.B. 5039 and H.B. 5040, Support for the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) 2025-2027 Budget

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) 2025-2027 budget. The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) is a membership organization representing 33 land trusts, soil and water conservation districts, and conservation organizations working across Oregon to protect our habitat and natural spaces – for all people, forever. Collectively, our members have protected more than 318,000 acres of land across our state.

Since the inception of OWEB, land trusts, soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) and conservation organizations have been key partners in acquiring, restoring, and protecting habitat across the state. Collectively, Oregon's land trusts have protected more than 318,000 acres of land across the state. OWEB uses lottery dollars through Measure 76 to provide the *only* dedicated source of statewide funding for habitat protection and land acquisition in Oregon.

Over the past two bienniums, OWEB has responded to requests from partners, the legislature, and the Governor's Office to take on new responsibilities and programs due to their reputation as an effective and responsive grant administrator. Their budget has grown from \$125 million with 41 authorized positions (19-21 actuals) to a 25-27 requested budget of \$225 million, **almost double**, with only four positions added.

Additions to OWEB's grant program offerings include farm and ranchland protection through the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP), funding for natural



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

climate solutions on natural and working lands, grants to water suppliers to protect drinking water through the Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program, and new fiscal administration responsibilities under the Oregon vs. Monsanto settlement.

Governor Kotek has made clear her priorities for Oregon's agencies include improving customer service and program delivery. Support for staffing and program continuity under these programs is critical for improving customer service, ensuring efficient program delivery and delivering on the ground conservation outcomes that support Measure 76 and Oregon's climate goals.

When considering OWEB's 2025-2027 Budget, COLT is asking that this Committee support the following three priorities:

#1. Enhanced funding for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program through H.B. 3131

The Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP) is Oregon's only program that directly protects farm and ranchlands from fragmentation and conversion to non-farm use. OAHP was created by agriculture and conservation groups in 2017 and funded in the 2022 and 2024 short legislative sessions. **These funds have led to the permanent protection of over 12,000 acres of farm and ranch lands throughout the state and leveraged record federal investment through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).**

OAHP funds working land conservation easements, conservation management planning, succession planning, and technical assistance. OAHP provides our community with a statewide source of funding that protects our agriculture and rangeland from development while keeping it in production, supporting rural economies with dollars that recirculate in communities, and paying producers for practices that conserve natural resources.

The Governor's Requested Budget (GRB) includes \$2 million in funding for the program, but a 2024 survey conducted by the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) found robust demand for additional funds that far exceeds the \$2 million included in the GRB. Specifically, **the survey identified 25 projects across the state that would protect 38,000 acres of working lands and require a \$17.3 million investment from the state legislature.**

On behalf of land trusts, agricultural land owners, industry groups and conservation organizations, we ask that you provide OWEB with the \$17.3M needed for the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program. This funding request is currently before the Ways and Means committee in **H.B. 3131** that passed unanimously out of the House Agriculture Committee in February. OAHP is a bipartisan program that leverages federal investments, supports local communities, and keeps working farms working.



#2 Continued funding for the Drinking Water Source Protection Grant Program through H.B. 3341

The Drinking Water Source Protection (DWSP) Grant Program was established by the legislature in 2023 with strong support from communities to provide grants for the protection, restoration, or enhancement of sources of drinking water through land acquisition and conservation.

Oregon's drinking water challenges will become more complex as our built infrastructure ages, climate change and wildfire add uncertainty, and growing tourism increases pressures on communities and resources. The protection of drinking water sources is the most impactful way communities can ensure the quality, reliability, and resilience of their drinking water. It is also typically more cost effective and provides greater benefits than hard infrastructure investments.

The creation of the DWSP Grant Program filled a critical missing piece of this work - state funding for small communities to acquire and protect their drinking water sources. The first grant cycle for this program concluded in December 2024 and projects are currently under review.

There is robust demand for additional funds for this program. Last year, an OWEB survey of water providers and partners identified a total of \$34 million in existing project needs, with more than \$27 million in funding needs identified over the 2025-2027 biennium. Funding requests in the first grant cycle already exceed available grant funds. **On behalf of land trusts and the communities across Oregon working to protect and manage their drinking water sources, we urge this Committee to provide additional funding to the DWSP for the biennium.**

This funding request is captured in H.B. 3341, which would provide an additional \$5 million in funding for the program over the biennium. The bill had a hearing earlier in February in the House Agriculture Committee and we expect it to pass out unanimously to Ways and Means.

#3 Supporting staffing and program continuity through Policy Option Packages (POPs)

OWEB's Agency Requested Budget includes multiple Policy Option Packages (POPs) that provide staffing and program continuity for well established and newly created grant programs. We urge this Committee to support the following POPs that will allow OWEB to continue to support grant programs and deliver conservation outcomes across the state:

- **POP 090:** Includes new General Fund investments for OAHP grants (\$2 million) to provide staffing continuity for the 2nd half of the biennium, a \$5 million investment in the Natural and Working Lands fund, and staffing continuity for the Drinking Water Source Protection Program.



- **POP 100:** Converts one limited duration management position to a permanent position to lead all land and water acquisitions and stewardship work at OWEB.
- **POP 102:** Requests one new permanent NRS3 position and associated services and supplies to coordinate the agency's required work for and engagement with grantees about stewardship and compliance monitoring of investments that involve permanent interests in land.
- **POP 105:** Requests position authority for two limited duration positions for 12 months to continue operation of the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP).
- **POP 106:** Converts one limited duration Operations and Policy Analyst 4 (OPA 4) position and one limited duration Administrative Specialist 2 (AS 2) position to permanent positions to administer the water acquisitions program and other agency administration.
- **POP 107 & POP 108:** Staffing Capacity and Continuity to support OWEB's positions for the Environmental Restoration Council.

Sincerely,



Joe Buttafuoco
Executive Director
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

