



February 25, 2025

Co-Chair Frederick, Co-Chair Levy and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) agency budget. My name is Joe Liebezeit, and I'm the Statewide Conservation Director for the Bird Alliance of Oregon. On behalf of our over 12,000 members we would like to express our strong support for the inclusion of the \$5M for the Natural and Working Lands (NWL) Fund in OWEB's budget (Package 090) for the 2025-2027 biennium. This funding is of strong interest to the Governor and was included in the Governor's Recommended Budget. This support is essential in continuing to build this relatively new and important program that helps Oregon meet its climate goals by supporting habitat restoration and technical assistance for projects in Oregon's natural and working lands.

For Bird Alliance of Oregon, a key interest in this program is that many of the supported projects do and will continue to have critical co-benefits by protecting habitats, wildlife, and fish including species of conservation concern. The beauty is this can all happen while lifting up the economy of local communities in underserved parts of our state. For example, the first round of Natural Climate Solutions funding is supporting channel and seagrass restoration in the Tillamook Estuary. Eelgrass meadows are incredibly important as a nursery for commercially important fish like juvenile salmon and also for sensitive bird species like the Black Brant which is a "strategy species" in Oregon Department of Wildlife's Oregon Conservation Strategy.

At the same time, eelgrass safeguards coastal communities from the impacts of climate change. The plant sequesters carbon dioxide up to 35x faster than tropical forests, protects shorelines from storms and erosion, and buffers ocean acidification. So the work being done to restore the Tillamook estuary will have multiple benefits to communities, habitats and helping meet Oregon's climate change goals.

Please support the inclusion of the \$5M investment of the Natural Working Land Fund in OWEB's budget for the 2025-2027 biennium. Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Liebezeit". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Joe Liebezeit
Statewide Conservation Director
Bird Alliance of Oregon