

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. On behalf of the Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) Coalition, **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 fund, which was included in the Governor's Recommended Budget at \$5M, is a significant step towards ensuring that Oregon's natural and working lands continue and increase their contributions to climate change mitigation.

The Oregon Natural Climate Solutions (NCS) Coalition is a group of climate, conservation, and working lands focused organizations, committed to helping increase the pace and scale of natural climate solutions and increasing investments in our natural and working lands. Coalition members work directly with farmers, ranchers, and forest owners and managers to implement these nature-based practices and are excited to see these funds invested in technical assistance, financial assistance, and on-the-ground projects for land managers, producers, and forest owners.

With OWEB as the fiscal agent, the NWL Fund invests in *existing* programs and projects at Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and OWEB that result in the adoption and implementation of NCS practices on our natural and working lands.

The NWL Fund supports boots-on-the-ground through financial and technical assistance to landowners, managers, and community organizations ready to take nature-based climate action. These practices sequester and store carbon and provide economic, social, and health benefits for Oregonians. The NWL fund has leveraged at least \$12 million in federal investments to date, with the likelihood for additional funds.

We are so excited to see the funds hitting the ground in Oregon, addressing invasive grasses in rangelands in North Central Oregon, funding tidal restoration in the Tillamook and Umpqua regions, funding climate-smart forest restoration, and funding new grants for conservation practices on farms and ranches. These projects will increase resiliency in fire prone rangelands and forests, improve flood protection and shoreline stabilization along the coast, and increase soil health among many other benefits.

This snapshot of the many projects and programs funded with the initial allocation is indicative of the increasing demand for Oregon to invest in our natural and working lands. Continuity of the NWL funds is critical for these places and the people who work in them. The more we can invest in projects and practices that benefit both people and nature, the more resilient our communities can be in the face of a changing climate. When funding is available one year and not the next, interest in the programs decreases, and it becomes difficult for land managers and community organizations to anticipate what will be available and take best advantage of it.

With the investment of the \$5M into the NWL Fund, agencies will be able to continue programs they've developed, retain technical staff that are familiar with the programs, and sustain relationships with the individuals and communities applying for and implementing the practices. Of particular importance is the retention of the Climate Resiliency staff position proposed in the Governor's recommended budget. This position is critical in leading engagement with communities and Tribes on how best to utilize and distribute OWEB's NWL Funds and has been instrumental in collaboration with other implementing agencies. We urge support for the inclusion of the Climate Resiliency staff position in the OWEB budget.

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

Signed,

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