

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire

Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Chair Sollman, Vice Chair Brock-Smith, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Tristan Henry, Oregon Field Representative for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP). At TRCP, we work to ensure that Oregon's fish, wildlife, and the wild and working lands that support our outdoor heritage are managed using science-based, collaborative approaches. While we share the goal of expanding renewable energy to address climate change, we must ensure that this development does not come at the expense of our natural resources.

SB 969 proposes to remove the Energy Facility Siting Council's (EFSC) jurisdiction over renewable energy projects located exclusively on federal lands. We are deeply concerned that this change would weaken critical environmental safeguards and sideline robust, local oversight. The EFSC process has long been our state's tool for integrating multiple layers of review—from state wildlife priorities to local stakeholder input—ensuring that renewable energy projects are sited in areas where they minimize impacts on habitat connectivity, key wildlife corridors, and communities.

Wildlife and Habitat Protection: The Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Western Solar Plan sets a strong example of careful, science-based siting. This plan, developed with extensive stakeholder engagement, excludes high-conflict areas—including critical winter ranges, migration corridors, and sage-grouse core habitats—from solar development. By removing EFSC oversight, SB 969 risks bypassing these nuanced protections. Without a state regulatory arbiter, projects approved solely through federal NEPA review may not adequately address Oregon-specific wildlife and habitat priorities. This is particularly troubling in light of the uncertain federal regulatory environment.

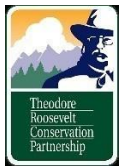
Regulatory Oversight and Accountability: EFSC is designed to ensure that all major energy projects comply with Oregon's high standards for public safety, environmental protection, and local compatibility. Its comprehensive review process—which integrates expertise from ODFW, DLCD, DEQ, and local governments—is essential to enforce state-specific mitigation measures (such as those mandated in ORS 496.012 and related guidance). SB 969 would effectively relegate ODFW to a secondary, advisory role at a time when it is already tasked with additional responsibilities, including the recent request for a fee increase to maintain its service levels.

Stakeholder Engagement: The BLM’s solar siting process demonstrates the value of inclusive, transparent public input. Over the course of several public comment periods, agencies and conservation groups helped shape exclusion criteria that protect sensitive habitats. By contrast, SB 969 has progressed with limited stakeholder consultation. Without a robust process that includes local, tribal, and conservation voices, this bill risks permitting projects that do not reflect the interests of communities or the protection needs of our wildlife.

Precedent and Long-Term Impact: There have been no renewable energy projects in Oregon built solely on federal lands to date. Removing EFSC jurisdiction based on a perceived—but unproven—need sets a dangerous precedent. It signals that Oregon is willing to forgo its state-level review even as federal NEPA standards may be weakened or streamlined in the future. This change would erode the checks and balances built into our land-use system, reducing our ability to direct development away from our most sensitive areas.

While we support the advancement of renewable energy in Oregon, we believe that development must be conducted responsibly. SB 969, as written, would undermine state oversight, weaken habitat protections, and reduce meaningful stakeholder engagement. Instead of removing EFSC jurisdiction, we urge lawmakers to refine renewable energy siting policies through a transparent, collaborative process—one that respects our state’s conservation priorities and the long-standing tradition of public stewardship over Oregon’s natural resources.

Thank you for considering our perspective. TRCP and our partners stand ready to engage with your offices and other stakeholders on solutions that truly balance renewable energy development with the conservation of our wildlife and wild lands.



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