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House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment

Testimony in support of HB 3628

Submitted by Laura Tabor, Climate Action Director

Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Gamba and Levy, and Committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 3628.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a non-partisan, science-based organization that works in communities across the state, manages lands and waters in varied ecosystems, and partners with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues we face. TNC is committed to fighting both climate change and biodiversity loss to create a future where people and nature thrive. We want to help Oregon meet its clean energy goals with least impact to nature and communities. Addressing gaps in transmission planning and financing are important steps towards a cleaner and more resilient grid.

Currently, no one agency is responsible for coordinating transmission planning across utilities in Oregon. We support establishing an independent entity to ensure more comprehensive and coordinated transmission planning occurs. A newly established state Transmission authority would not duplicate current transmission planning, but instead offer a focused pathway to identify, finance, and develop new transmission projects across the state that individual utility planning efforts might not prioritize. HB 3628 clearly directs the authority to coordinate and harmonize with utility, regional, and other transmission planning forums.

This bill also provides an opportunity to ensure new transmission projects make efficient use of existing lines and corridors, minimizing the impact of new transmission corridors. [Connected West](#), a recent study by GridWorks, found that 85% of new high-voltage transmission miles needed in the Western US can be added through reconductoring or expanding existing transmission corridors. We strongly support the directives in Section 6 and Section 15 which require consideration of these opportunities in planning and designating projects of statewide significance.

We also greatly appreciate and support the inclusion of conservation and Tribal perspectives in the board of directors and the proposed Tribal Advisory Council. Consideration of environmental and cultural impacts early in planning processes offers an opportunity to identify and avoid potential conflicts up front, and these perspectives will be critical in identifying ways to streamline permitting that uphold necessary protections for natural and cultural resources. However, the current bill does not include resources to ensure capacity for Tribal representatives to participate. We urge you to consider financial support, including stipends and travel reimbursement, for Tribal Advisory Council members.

We also offer the following detailed suggestions to strengthen the bill:

- Section 6 references both identifying and establishing electric transmission corridors and identifying and developing projects, but Section 15 only covers corridors. It may be helpful to define “projects” in this context, and we suggest clarifying that projects the Authority identifies as having statewide significance should also meet criteria in subsections 2-4 of Section 15.
- Section 9.1.d could be read as indicating consideration of environmental and cultural impacts only occurs if there are public hearings required. This section, which spells out how the authority makes a final determination, starts with “following any required public hearings.” It would be helpful to clarify that “In making a final determination on whether to undertake a proposed project, the authority shall take into consideration, using data from state agencies, any adverse environmental or cultural impacts from the proposed project” is true for any project, regardless of whether any public hearings may be required.

We strongly urge your support of HB 3628 and moving this bill forward.