

Dear Co-chair Helm, Co-chair Owens and members of the committee,

I am writing to ask that you please support HB 3580 and HB 3587, and our invaluable rocky habitats and eelgrass meadows. These bills offer a great opportunity to support biodiversity, coastal economies, and increase resilience to a changing climate.

Oregon's underwater eelgrass meadows are biodiversity hotspots, carbon sinks, and nursery habitat to many juvenile fish species. Their health is vital for sustaining our fisheries, maintaining water quality, and buffering against climate impacts. However, there are signs these essential habitats are in decline in Oregon. HB 3580 would set up a Taskforce to set conservation targets through a collaborative effort involving agencies, Tribes, scientists, local communities, and others. This bill is the first essential step to proactively prevent habitat loss before it's too late.

Oregon's rocky habitats, like Haystack Rock and Coquille Point, are iconic tourist destinations for millions of visitors. They are also incredibly important for millions of nesting birds, marine mammals, fish and invertebrates. Increasing climate impacts and human disturbance are threatening these special places. HB 3587 would provide needed agency coordination to better protect these sites. It also would set up a grant fund for local communities to engage the public on best practices to enjoy these places while minimizing disturbance to sensitive wildlife and habitats.

Now is the time to act to protect our coastal ecosystems. For a modest investment we can ensure both eelgrass meadows and rocky habitats can be conserved for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Marge Cooney