

Submitter: Kristin Koptiuch
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3580

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.

I live in Tillamook County where our several bays and many coastal rocky habitat areas will be directly affected by these bills. Much of our regional economy relies on these areas, for seafood harvests and many dimensions of tourism. We have a front-row seat to witness the incremental but perceptible changes in our coastal environment wrought by climate change. In addition, some technologies permitted to grandfathered-in oyster fisheries have also been shown to be very damaging in particular to eel grass in Tillamook Bay. These bills address serious business issues for our rural coastal communities.

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 Tunnel Beach in Oceanside, 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,
Kristin Koptiuch