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Dear legislators,

On behalf of the 39 undersigned concerned scientists, organizations, and community leaders in Oregon, we write to ask you to safeguard Oregon's estuaries and eelgrass meadows by supporting the investments and conservation initiatives outlined in the [Eelgrass Action Bill \(HB 3580\)](#).

Eelgrass (seagrass) meadows play an essential role in maintaining healthy estuarine and ocean ecosystems and provide nursery habitat for a variety of marine species, including juvenile salmon, Dungeness crab, herring, and rockfish. [Eelgrass is recognized as Essential Fish Habitat](#) and a Habitat Area of Particular Concern by NOAA, because it supports species important for commercial and recreational fisheries - [worth \\$178 million each year](#). Furthermore, eelgrass meadows offer a number of climate mitigation benefits-critical for our coastal communities as climate change intensifies. Seagrass meadows [sequester carbon up to 35 times faster than tropical rainforests](#), protect coastlines from storm surges and erosion, and [buffer ocean acidification](#).

Unfortunately, eelgrass meadows have been in significant decline across the globe and the West Coast due to warming waters, pollution, sedimentation in the watershed, invasive species, and disease. [Oregon has lost over half of its estuary habitat](#), with eelgrass meadows in places like [Coos Bay suffering reductions of over 90% in recent years](#). However, [we don't know the current status of eelgrass meadows across all of the state's 22 estuaries](#) due to infrequent monitoring and mapping, which inhibits the protection and proactive management of this vital resource.

HB 3580 is the first step toward helping us understand the extent of eelgrass and needs for conservation. Specifically, the bill would create a Task Force of scientists, Tribes, stakeholders, and state agencies to collectively assess the status of eelgrass resources, develop conservation and restoration targets for the state, investigate knowledge gaps and policy barriers, and provide recommendations to the legislature to improve the management of these critical habitats along our coast.

HB 3580 is essential to safeguarding the health of our coastal ecosystems, and if passed it would support our fisheries and coastal communities, and enhance Oregon's climate resilience. **We encourage you to vote yes.**

Sincerely,

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