

Submitter: Amy Carlson

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,

As a person who loves, recreates in, and supports organizations working to protect Oregon's coast, I ask that you please support HB 3580 and Oregon's invaluable eelgrass meadows. Oregon's underwater eelgrass meadows provide vital ecosystem services, sustain our fisheries, maintain water quality, and powerfully buffer against climate impacts.

More specifically, eelgrass meadows are biodiversity hotspots, providing nursery habitat to many juvenile fish species such as salmon, Dungeness crab, rockfish, and herring, protecting sensitive fish and shellfish from low pH conditions, filtering and trapping sediments, and reducing harmful algal blooms. By supporting these marine foodwebs, eelgrass supports our coastal economies and jobs in fisheries, tourism, research, and aquaculture. Eelgrass also supports climate resilience by sequestering carbon (at 35 times the rate of tropical rainforests) and buffering against storm surges, which saves us on mitigation costs. Finally, eelgrass is culturally significant and sustains cultural practices for coastal Tribal Nations. These benefits are all important to me and to Oregon.

However, signs indicate that these essential habitats are in decline in Oregon. Oregon has seen severe declines of eelgrass, particularly in Coos Bay and Yaquina Bay in recent years, but limited monitoring data makes it hard to know the extent of loss in Oregon. Pollution, dredging and development, sedimentation from watershed, and some aquaculture practices are degrading eelgrass habitat and need to be better understood.

Importantly, HB 3580 creates a Taskforce to identify ways to improve eelgrass mapping, monitoring, and management, set conservation targets (for adoption in 2028 by the legislature and implementation by 2040) 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.

Please fully fund and support the Eelgrass Action Bill for the benefit of coastal communities and all Oregonians who love the coast by passing it out of committee, advocating for its passage, and voting yes for this bill during the legislative session.

Thank you for your consideration,
Amy Carlson