

March 4, 2025

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water
Oregon Legislature

Testimony in support of HB 3580: Relating to Eelgrass Resources

Submitted by Dick Vander Schaaf, Associate Coast and Marine Conservation Director

Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald and Members of the Committee,

As Associate Coast and Marine Conservation Director of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Oregon, **I am pleased to write in support of HB 3580**. This bill is critical to protecting the health of Oregon's estuaries and is a foundational step in restoring eelgrass in these essential habitats.

As a science-based, non-partisan organization that is committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends, TNC has been actively involved with the conservation of Oregon's estuaries for over 25 years. In 2014, TNC sponsored a report¹ examining which estuarine habitats are most important to species during their juvenile life stage. Fifteen species were selected for investigation due to their commercial, recreational, cultural and conservation importance, including species of salmonids, shark, Dungeness crab, rays, and flatfish, rockfish, and herring. Thirteen out of the 15 species studied were found to need healthy eelgrass beds as juveniles.

Without healthy eelgrass, their life cycles are disrupted, and negative impacts occur. This report noted that despite the strong dependence upon eelgrass for survival of these species, little was known about eelgrass habitats across the West Coast.

A subsequent study, conducted in 2018, tackled the challenge of documenting what was known about eelgrass. This report provided a synthesis of the known science on eelgrass habitats along the West Coast and the ecosystem services they provide, as well as identified knowledge gaps for future research and a spatial database of eelgrass locations and acres of extent.² Building upon

¹ Hughes, B. B., M. D. Levey, J. A. Brown, M. C. Fountain, A. B. Carlisle, S. Y. Litvin, C. M. Greene, W. N. Heady and M. G. Gleason. 2014. [Nursery Functions of U.S. West Coast Estuaries: The State of Knowledge for Juveniles of Focal Invertebrate and Fish Species](#). The Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA. 168pp.

² Kerman, K. DeBruyckere, L. 2018. [Eelgrass Habitats on the U.S. West Coast: State of the Knowledge of Eelgrass Ecosystem Services and Eelgrass Extent](#). The Nature Conservancy. Arlington, VA. 97pp.

this work, a third and final study was conducted that identified methods and best practices in eelgrass restoration and identified approaches that result in successful restoration.³

HB 3580 proposes to launch a Task Force to assess the status of eelgrass in Oregon's estuaries, evaluate policy barriers, update the state's monitoring and mapping programs, identify research needs, and set restoration targets. Additionally, the legislation calls for increased agency coordination and consultation with Tribes that have cultural and natural resource interests and a deep knowledge of eelgrass habitats.

Eelgrass habitats and the work proposed in HB 3580 is critically important to both people and nature. TNC has been a long-time proponent of protecting and conserving essential habitats, and we hope you will support this bill. We urge you to move this bill forward this session.

³ Beheshti, K. and Ward, M. 2021. [Eelgrass Restoration on the U.S. West Coast: A Comprehensive Assessment of Restoration Techniques and Their Outcomes](#). Prepared for the Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership.