

Submitter: William Kerwin
On Behalf Of: The Environment
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 eelgrass meadows. This bill offers a great opportunity to support biodiversity, coastal economies, and increase resilience to a climatic shifts.

As a resident and hard working-tax paying citizen of Coos Bay area, I strongly support the right for coastal communities who rely on healthy estuaries on the Oregon Coast for their livelihood. Responsible ecosystem management of areas that contain Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) - a vital indicator of estuarine health, supports biodiversity, fisheries, and coastal resilience. Healthy eelgrass meadows create nursery habitats for juvenile salmon, Dungeness crab, rockfish, and herring, ensuring the sustainability of Oregon's marine ecosystems.

Biodiversity these environments provide are essential for this beautiful area that draws international tourism, supports commercial and recreational fishing and Tribal nations traditional food sources and practices. As a recreational shellfish harvester and fisherman, I rely on the variety of foods provided by healthy ecosystems that in art enable me to provide for my family - underwater eelgrass meadows are a critical component of these activities. Eelgrass is the base for sustaining and ensuring successful fisheries, and provides a mechanism for estuary stability during heavy winter run-off and provides habitat refuge in the warmer summer months.

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. The full extent of eelgrass loss remains unknown due to limited data. However, this bill is the first essential step to proactively prevent habitat loss before it's too late. Oregon's underwater eelgrass meadows are biodiversity hotspots, carbon sinks, and nursery habitat to many juvenile fish species.

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

Sincerely,

Concerned Citizen