

Submitter: Emily Blackwell

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3580

Dear members of the committee,

I am writing to ask that you please support HB 3580 and our invaluable eelgrass meadows. This bill offers a great opportunity to support biodiversity, coastal economies, and increase resilience to a changing climate. I am a lifelong nature enthusiast, avid birder, and nature journaler who grew up eagerly anticipating annual family trips to the Oregon coast. Oregon's coastal habitats, particularly our underwater eelgrass meadows, comprise an integral part of our state and this bill will help conserve and steward them for future generations.

Oregon's eelgrass meadows sequester carbon, buffer against storm surges, reduce harmful algal blooms, protect sensitive fish and shellfish from low pH conditions by buffering ocean acidification, and support food webs by providing food and habitat for a variety of species. These strengths are in the interests of commercial and recreational parties on the coast, as well as sustaining cultural practices for coastal Tribal Nations. These 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. Unfortunately we currently have limited and outdated data on our eelgrass meadows. 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.

Please prioritize supporting our eelgrass meadows and the many industries, organisms, and people that rely on their continued healthy existence. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Emily Blackwell