

Submitter: Ken Bonetti
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

I am writing you in regard to important items I would like to see funded in the 2025-2027 budget.

Please support funding for the Eelgrass Action Bill (HB 3580) and Rocky Habitat Stewardship Bill (HB 3587), to help improve the management of these critical coastal habitats so they can continue to bolster healthy ecosystems, economies, and fisheries. Eel grass is an important diminishing resource that very much needs protection from further degradation, particularly as there are development proposals that would further degrade existing eel grass meadows. Oregon's underwater eelgrass meadows are biodiversity hotspots, carbon sinks, and nursery habitat for many juvenile fish species. Their health is vital for sustaining our fisheries, maintaining water quality, and buffering against climate impacts. HB 3580 would set up a task force 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.

In line with my first request, I am asking that you reject \$10 million in funding for the Port of Coos Bay's dredging project. This budget line is part of the Oregon Business Development Department proposed agency budget--HB 5024. This funding is premature when the Coos Bay Estuary Management Plan (CBEMP) has yet to be updated and the Port does not have the necessary permits in place to execute the project. We need S. coast folks to tell the legislature there are better ways to invest in the community now. I am on the CBEMP Citizen Advisory Committee as an at large representative for the City of North Bend. We have not yet had our first meeting yet, so any funding for the Port's project would be upending a process for which many of us in the region worked very hard to update. Further updates are very much needed before irreversible decisions are made that may impact the estuary, particularly its eel grass prairies.

Finally, please support robust budgets for state agencies that manage critical coastal resources, including the Department of Land Conservation and Development, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Department of State Lands (whose budget includes funding for the South Slough Reserve). As the Trump administration continues to slash federal jobs and investments in natural resources, climate, public lands, and research, we need Oregon to hold the line and ensure our state agencies are well-resourced to continue this critical work.

Thank you for your attention to these issues that are extremely important to our region.

