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## House Land Use Committee

April 16, 2013

### House Bill 2106

*Statement of Bruce Taylor / Director, Oregon Biodiversity Program, Defenders of Wildlife*

Defenders of Wildlife participated on the task force Governor Kitzhaber convened in late 2011 to develop recommendations for his 10-Year Energy Action Plan, and we very much support the proposals outlined in the final version of his plan. One of the key elements of the governor's plan is a proposal to develop a landscape-level plan to guide energy facility siting and mitigation in eastern Oregon.

As it stands right now, both developers and permitting authorities are confronted with a landscape full of narrow and specific do's and don'ts, and not much clarity in terms of the state's broader priorities for where development should occur and where it shouldn't. That's because the state of Oregon has a lot of different policy priorities, some of them conflicting.

Developing a plan to sort out those conflicting priorities and establish what the governor's proposal calls "a shared vision" for how new energy facilities and other development fit into the landscape of eastern Oregon is a tall order, and beyond the scope of what can be addressed through this bill. But we hope the state will move forward with this effort over the next few years, because when development pressure begins to pick up again, and proposals for major new transmission lines begin to emerge, it will be important to have some context for siting decisions that could have a profound impact on the future of that part of the state.

In the meantime, with a federal decision coming up in 2015 on listing of sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act, we have a very narrow window of time to come up with a better way to deal with mitigation issues in eastern Oregon.

Right now, most mitigation occurs piecemeal on an ad hoc basis, through a process that developers find cumbersome and expensive. For wildlife, the results too often look like a random set of conservation actions that add up to less than the sum of their parts.

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We believe it should be possible to develop a mitigation system for sage grouse habitat impacts that is more transparent, efficient, and cost-effective and allows appropriate development to move forward with greater certainty and lower costs. One of the keys to making this work in the context of a pending ESA decision is demonstrating that Oregon is taking a more strategic approach, targeting investments in compensatory mitigation to locations and actions that offer the greatest long-term benefits for sage grouse and other conservation values. Market-based mechanisms, including mitigation banks and crediting systems like those used in wetlands mitigation, would provide greater predictability, transparency, and certainty for all parties.

The concepts underlying this landscape approach to mitigation have already been fairly well developed, and are already being applied in some other settings. Portland General Electric has been exploring options for such an approach with the eastern portion of its Cascade Crossing transmission line, and the early outlook is promising.

We look forward to working with the governor's office and other stakeholders to develop a new mitigation system that can provide an alternative path to deal with impacts of large-scale development in sage grouse habitats. We hope you will join us in supporting this effort.

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