



City Manager's Office

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February 27, 2013

Representative Brian Clem
Chair, House Committee on Land Use

Testimony in opposition of House Bill 2173

Chair Clem and members of the House Land Use Committee,

The City of Eugene is opposed to HB 2173. Under the current Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS), creation, restoration, or enhancement of wetlands is an outright permitted use in lands zoned Exclusive Farm Use (EFU). HB 2173 would amend ORS to require wetland creation, restoration, or enhancement activities to a conditional use in lands zoned EFU. The City of Eugene is opposed to these amendments to current ORS.

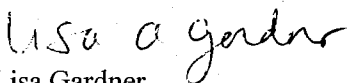
Most of the agricultural lands that are in or around Eugene were historically wetlands. In addition, much of the land in close proximity to the Willamette River or other low elevation rivers in the Willamette Valley were wetlands. These wetlands served very important functions, including to maintain water quality in our rivers and streams. Good water quality is a key to human health, as well as to the vitality of our fisheries (e.g., salmon) and wildlife. These wetlands also served to reduce the risk of large flood events, thereby saving human lives and reducing negative impacts to humans and infrastructure.

Over the last 150 years, many of these wetlands were converted to other uses, including agriculture. It has been well documented by scientists and land managers in many parts of the country, including in Oregon, that the dramatic loss of wetlands has had negative consequences for water quality, flood mitigation, fisheries and wildlife, and human health.

Therefore, in strategic locations, it makes great sense to return these "former wetlands" back into wetlands. Doing so protects infrastructure (e.g., roads, power lines, waste water lines), protects water quality, reduces flood risk, and improves fish and wildlife habitat. Over the past twenty years, the City of Eugene has purchased agricultural lands along key streams and then restored them to provide these multiple benefits to our community and surrounding areas. We also know of private landowners with farms near Eugene that have partnered with watershed councils to restore wetlands on their property to achieve the same benefits. HB 2173 would make it more expensive and more time intensive for the City and for interested farmers to plan and implement such important projects that safeguard our community. In addition, HB 2173 would make it more difficult for the State of Oregon to implement the mission of several key departments, including the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, Oregon Department of State Lands, and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Thank you for consideration of our position. Again, the City of Eugene OPPOSES HB 2173. We urge you to make a DO NOT PASS recommendation on this bill.

Sincerely,



Lisa Gardner
Intergovernmental Relations Manager