

DATE: February 26, 2013

TO: The Oregon House Land Use Committee
Chairman: Representative Brian Clem
Vice Chairman: Representative Kevin Cameron
Vice Chairman: Representative Lew Frederick
Representative: John Davis
Representative: Paul Holvey
Representative: Kim Thatcher
Representative: Ben Unger

REGARDING: Testimony on HB 2201 & 2202

My name is Sam Sweeney and I live @ 1070 Ferry St. Dayton, OR 97114. I am a senior partner in a three generation family farm operation that operates in Yamhill County primarily in the Dayton area. We have farmed in that area for about ninety years raising a wide variety of both dryland and irrigated crops. I also serve on the Yamhill Soil & Water Conservation District board of directors and have for nearly thirty years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and speak for the need and urgency to address a critical issue confronting agriculture in Oregon.

I am in favor of the two bills, particularly HB 2202 since it would be protective of high value & unique soils. My testimony today will provide some of the reasons why Oregon needs to address the ongoing conversion & loss of Oregon's high value & unique soils in the river bottoms along the Willamette River. All of us, whether we are farmers or consumers depend on our soil resources for producing food and other commodities that are a large part of Oregon's economic base.

In Yamhill County, conversions allowing mining on the high value unique agricultural soils along the Willamette River started in the 1980s. However, most of us were unaware of these conversions until 2004. It was that year an aggregate company on an adjacent farm next to ours in the Lambert Bend river bottoms applied for a zone change from Agriculture use to mineral extraction. A group of us with the help of one of the best land use attorneys in Oregon fought the conversion. We lost. The very next year there was another application for a zone change on the northern part of Grand Island. We fought that one too and lost. In 2010 there was another application for a zone change on the opposite end of Grand Island. This time a much larger group of landowners and other concerned county citizens fought this one. To date after numerous hearing and appeals; this one too has apparently been lost.

Since the county has a very limited amount of these high value, unique & irrigated soils these conversions are significant; and ultimately a devastating loss to agriculture and the counties economy. The majority of these soils are in two areas. The Lambert Bend/Dorsey Bottoms has about 1500 acres. Approximately one third of this has either been mined, or being mined, or has been converted for future use leaving about 1000 acres. The other area is Grand Island, a four thousand acre island. Due to the recent conversions, the island has lost 640 acres, or 16% of it's high value irrigated soils! In Yamhill County, the total loss of these high value, unique soils since the 1980s is approximately 1300 acres with the majority of the loss occurring since 2004.

For Yamhill County, this is a tragedy. A county planner estimated that within a 100 years, these river bottom areas with special soils would be largely gone and unable to contribute to the counties economy. What has the county lost in economic terms? Grand Island's high value soils produce crops with a conservatively gross farm gate value of \$1500.00 P/acre P/year. The island has 4000 acres of which approximately 3000 are tillable acres. Using these figures, the farm gate value for the Island every year would be about 4.5 million dollars.

To produce these commodities and for them to reach consumers requires many steps and supporting businesses. It starts with crop inputs, seeds, labor, processing, transportation, machinery, sales, etc. All of these steps adds to and supports the area's economy. These related commodities activities increase the original farm gate value approximately three or more times. This is called the multiplier factor. As a result, agriculture on Grand Island contributes approximately 13.5 million dollars to the county and Oregon's economy every year. And as long as Grand Island is there, this will continue year after year and for ever.

But these conversions are more than just the loss of the high value soils and a blow to the counties economy. Grand Island, the counties "Garden of Eden" is also home to approximately 25 families with most of them involved in farming the island's rich soils. When the mining commences and the large noisy trucks haul their island away, these families ability to farm and enjoy their previous quality of life will be greatly diminished.

And after the mining is over, and only ponds of water are left, where will these farm families go? Where will they farm? Agriculture has no other alternatives. When the island is gone, there is no other place to go. Agriculture, the county and the state will have lost 4000 acres of some of the highest producing land in the state. This loss is devastating to Yamhill County and the state of Oregon.

This is in contrast to the aggregate industry. They have many other options or sources of rock. They can get it from the surrounding hills and nearby mountains, or ship it in by rail and barge from the large areas of poor rocky lands on the Columbia River. Currently It can now be shipped by barge from the Boardman area to Portland for less than \$3.00 per ton.

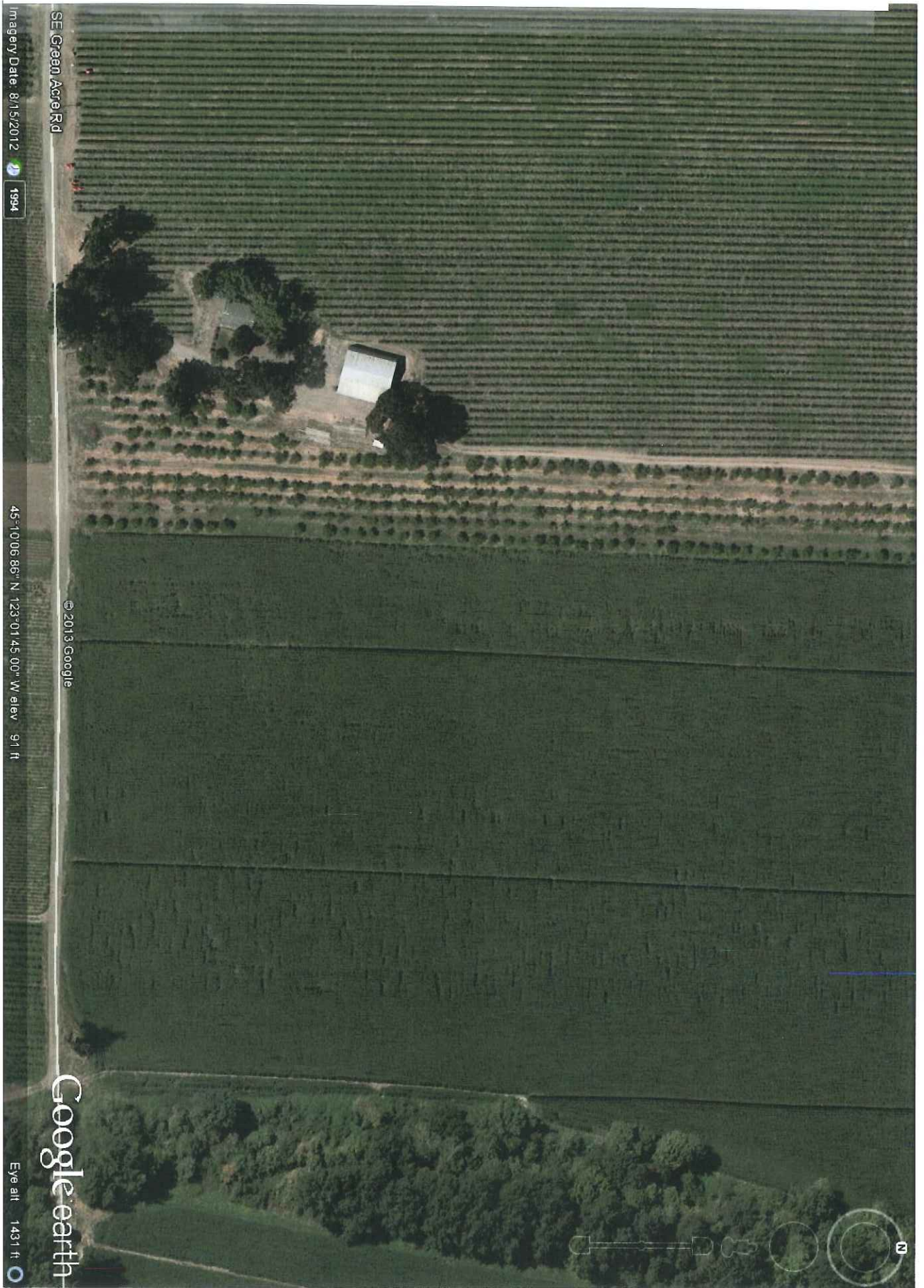
Oregon can not afford to continue losing these highly productive high value soils and the families that farm them. It has to stop. This is why I strongly urge this committee to approve HB 2202.

This is a critical issue and I appreciate the opportunity to present testimony regarding the two bills. If you need additional information, or clarification, do not hesitate to contact or call me.

Sincerely,


Sam Sweeney

Farmland in the Lambert Bend area growing Marion Berries, Peaches and corn



SE Green Acre Rd

Imagery Date: 8/15/2012 1994

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45°10'06.86" N 123°01'45.00" W elev 91 ft

Google earth

Eye alt 1431 ft

Farmland on Grand Island growing a wide variety of crops for Consumer Supported Agriculture markets. Due to the Island's rich soils and increasing market demand this type of farming is increasing every year.



Imagery Date: 8/15/2012 1994

45°07'36.42" N 123°02'08.70" W elev 96 ft

Eye alt 977 ft

Google Earth

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Current mining operation near the Willamette River in Yamhill County



Imagery Date: 8/15/2012 1994

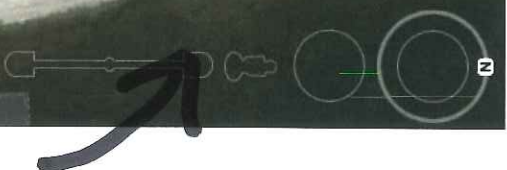
45°11'32.18" N 123°01'22.64" W elev 87 ft

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Eye alt 1641 ft

Willamette River



Previous high value farm land adjacent to the Willamette River destroyed by mining and left in ponds with no value to the county or communities.

Willamette River

