

March 2, 2013

Chair Clem and Members of the House Committee on Land Use:

I submit this testimony in opposition to HB 2173.

The voluntary protection, enhancement, and restoration of wetlands by willing landowners are essential tools in building durable, resilient natural infrastructure around and within Oregon's rural and urban communities.

The importance of healthy wetlands and riparian areas in protecting communities from floods and enhancing water resources for fish and wildlife protection and municipal consumption, among other purposes, cannot be overstated.

HB 2173 is a solution in search of a problem. It is poorly-drafted and overly-broad and will burden efforts by community-supported land trusts, local governments, and natural resources managers to work with willing landowners to protect and restore vital wetlands. Discouraging voluntary conservation measures by requiring conditional use permits on EFU lands will only serve to inhibit innovative, creative partnerships between agricultural landowners, community-supported land trusts and conservancies, and natural resource managers. Such creative, forward-thinking partnerships are emerging throughout Oregon, including in the mid-Willamette Valley.

I encourage the Committee to learn about the innovative partnerships between agricultural landowners and the Greenbelt Land Trust and McKenzie River Trust to protect and restore wetland and riparian areas of the Willamette River and its tributaries. HB 2173 would enact barriers to such emerging partnerships to the detriment of Oregon's communities and generations to come. While the issue may warrant further study, HB 2173 is a blunt-force, premature, and unnecessary measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.