



February 12, 2014

## **Public Testimony for SB 1554, Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development**

Good afternoon Chair Hass and Members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Kelley Beamer and I am the Executive Director of the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT). COLT is a state association that represents 19-member land trusts. Our mission is to serve and strengthen the land trust community of Oregon.

COLT is concerned that the legislation before you today, SB 1554, is harmful to the missions of our 19 members. Land trusts work with private landowners to obtain conservation easements and acquisitions that maintain working farms and ranches, protect water quality, protect wildlife habitat, and preserve open lands in Oregon.

Land trusts are committed to the long-term health and sustainability of agriculture in Oregon and have a strong record of building collaborative relationships with farm and ranch landowners in Oregon. COLT recognizes the threats to our rural communities and is aligned with the objective of creating strong local economies and schools where our land trusts are located and do work. However, we also support the broad-based desire of the State to conserve Oregon's natural heritage.

**COLT opposes SB 1554 because it has unintended implications that limit the choices of private landowners, overlook land trust contributions, and undermine conservation in Oregon.**

- **Limits Landowner Rights**

Under SB 1554, a county could adopt an ordinance to limit the purchase of land by a state, county or local government unless land of equivalent real market value and class is sold by the same government entity into taxable ownership or use. This removes the immediate options of landowners to sell to a public partner.

Land trusts use conservation incentives to help families stay on their land. SB 1554 impedes landowners from enrolling new land into special property tax programs for conservation by only allowing new land to be enrolled if land of equivalent value and class is removed from the same program. Conservation easements are the most flexible instrument for transferring rights according to the wishes of the landowner, and this bill would allow no net gain of these agreements in counties that adopt this ordinance.

- **Many Land Trusts are Tax-Paying landowners**

The majority of land trusts in Oregon are landowners that manage and steward land. Several of our member land trusts, like the McKenzie River Trust, Columbia Land Trust and Friends of the Columbia Gorge continue to pay property taxes, despite potential tax exemptions.



- **Undermining conservation**

If adopted, ordinances as described in SB 1554 would have the effect of a moratorium on state, county and local government land acquisition for conservation, recreation and many other purposes in the public's interest and a moratorium on any new land entering into property tax programs aimed at encouraging conservation.

**Addressing the Problem**

COLT supports a broad-based conversation and study to better understand the underlying problems faced by rural counties to ensure that the real issues are surfaced and can be dealt with. We envision ourselves as a partner in helping maintain the vitality of communities across the state.

Thank you very much for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,  
Kelley Beamer, Executive Director  
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts