

NORTH SLOPE HAY AND FARMS

February 12, 2014

TO: Senator Mark Hass, and Committee Members
Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development
c/o Richard Donovan, Committee Administrator

RE: SB 1554

Dear Senator Hass and Members of the Committee:

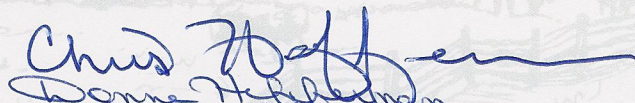
My family owns a farm and ranching operation in Union County. We have been working with the Oregon Department of Forestry and the United States Forest Service for the past three years on a Forest Legacy Program project. This federal program, whose intent is to keep working forests working in rural America, has money available to private landowners who are willing to place conservation easements on their property. These easements will be held by the Oregon Department of Forestry. We were honored to represent Oregon in the 2013 Forest Legacy Program and ranked 11th in the nation. Our project promotes active land management, including timber harvesting and sustainable forestry, cattle grazing, protection of habitat for animals and plants, and educational opportunities in the local community. We are now in the process of finalizing our Forest Stewardship Plan and the conservation easement with personnel from the State Forestry's Salem office.

We were not aware of Senate Bill 1554 until a few days ago and are concerned the Bill comes as a political reaction to a situation involving a proposed state park in another county. While we are not completely familiar with those circumstances, what we are familiar with is our family livelihood in farming and forestry, our private property rights and our freedoms to lease, sell, trade, or grant conservation easements in and to our private property.

Although we believe this bill is intended to be positive for rural Oregonians as a whole, our concern is that some unintended consequences may arise for landowners. For that reason, we do not feel this is a Bill that should be passed without a series of public hearings around the state where private property owners can learn how the Bill would work. We have looked at it and it is very complicated and we believe Oregon's citizens should be given an opportunity and time to make reasonable decisions with respect to it. Our feeling at this point is that the Bill should be tabled, and heard at a later legislative session after full disclosure and discussion by Oregon citizens.

Thank you for taking the time to read our concerns regarding Senate Bill 1554.

Sincerely,


Chris and Donna Heffernan