



HARNEY COUNTY COURT

Office of Judge Steven E. Grasty

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Good afternoon. For the record I am Steve Grasty, Harney County Judge, Burns, Oregon.

Greetings from the far East and I think I am happy to report that there is now snow on the Cascades.

I am here to speak in support of **HB 4093**. I would like to remind us of a sad bit of Oregon's history and then provide you with a rural county's (community) solution to preventing a repeat.

Nearly 30 years ago the spotted owl was federally listed as an endangered species. The agencies at that time quickly wrote plans and regulations to address the issue. In hind sight it is sad that those plans left out the affected communities and industry when considering or implementing solutions. We lost the very folks on the ground that could have been the workers for a solution. Fast forward to today. Confronting the possible listing of Sage Grouse as an endangered species folks in Harney County decided to attempt a proactive approach.

USFWS has a process called a "Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances" a CCAA if you would. The agreement is used on private lands with willing land owners prior to an endangered species. It allows a private landowner (voluntarily) to establish management actions beneficial to habitat and for the continued operation of that land. It also comes with protections to that land owner should a candidate species be listed. To further confuse this the BLM working with Oregon Cattlemen's Association have administratively entered into a similar arrangement on public lands (with grazing permits) for cooperative management. A CCA if you would. The value of this is that if a land owner establishes a "double A" on his property he could also enter into a "single A" on his grazing permit. This would allow similar management actions across ownership boundaries.

A year ago the Harney Soil and Water Conservation District formed a committee to investigate and write a programmatic CCAA which would cover the entire county, all 10,000 square miles of it. After many 1000's of man hours a group of 25+ members wrote that CCAA. Involved folks included. Cattlemen, land owners, USFWS, BLM Malheur National Wildlife Refuge staff, Scientists from EOARC/ARS, county commissioners and other interested parties. The document was completed approximately three months ago and submitted to the federal NEPA process. The public comments period ended last Friday. So now we are waiting for a decision and are very optimistic that the outcome will be the opportunity for our private property owners to proactively participate in a solution to protect habitat and hopefully prevent a listing of the Sage Grouse.

We, our rural communities and our industry, want to be part of the solution and we want to be a participant in both planning and decision making.

So why the need for **HB 4093**? The CCAA will be between the SWCD and USFWS countywide. There will be a written agreement between SWCD and each land owner. This is where the need for

the privacy protection comes in. Currently our SWCD has verbal pledges of over 100,000 acres of private land IF their private information can be protected. That commitment of private land can be projected to increase three fold if folks do not believe that the information being collected will be used against them. This information is critical to the operation of their businesses and should be protected just as we would for a business in this community.

What is important for the committee to know is that IF we can get significant amounts of private lands committed under the CCAA we may prevent the listing of SG as endangered or at least significantly reduce the impacts of a listing within this state. This is a true opportunity to allow communities to engage in proactive actions to sustain important SG habitat and to sustain our communities. It is also important for you to understand what this is not .. it is not an effort to protect information for industrial development. While we have heard that rumor the truth is that industrial development requires a public vetting through county land use processes anyway.

Please help our rural communities help themselves. This bill is a win win for our state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Steven E. Grasty". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S".

Steven E. Grasty
Judge, Harney County Court