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Protecting the Oregon Coast

Feb. 23, 2015

Beth Reiley, Administrator
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature
Salem, OR

Re: SB 25

Sent via email: beth.reiley@state.or.us

Dear Chair Edwards and members of the Committee,

Oregon Coast Alliance (ORCA) is an Oregon nonprofit corporation whose mission is to protect and restore the coast's natural resources. We write in strong opposition to SB 25, a bill to exempt eight counties in eastern Oregon from the land use laws if they have not shown population growth.

This bill would decouple several aspects of land use planning from one another, including transportation planning, infrastructure planning, housing planning and (of very grave concern) natural hazards planning. Urban planning would also suffer, as this bill allows cities in an affected county to also avoid land use requirements. This in turn affects housing and infrastructure planning.

This bill, if passed, will set a terrible precedent for maintaining the integrity of Oregon's unique land use laws. Though the majority of coastal counties, where ORCA works, have shown modest growth in some years, they may at any time temporarily cease to have population growth due to economic factors.

They, too, would certainly want to apply for legislation similar to this bill, if implemented, to be crafted for them. This would be a disaster. The coast is subject to nearly continuous natural hazards (coastal erosion, winter gales, increasing wave heights during storms, very high tides, etc.), and strong land use planning to protect communities, health and safety and the transportation network is critical. Land use planning is also the prime tool that protects riparian habitat essential to providing clear cold water necessary for the healthy salmon runs so critical to coastal economies.

Furthermore, agriculture is a mainstay of the coastal economy, along with tourism. Cranberry farming, dairy farming, cattle ranching and many other agricultural enterprises would be made vulnerable to ill-conceived development in the event that this loophole is enacted into place.

The only through highway on the coast is Highway 101. It is threatened in many areas with landslides and erosion, and clogged with excessive development. Maintaining it as a through highway, ensuring it does not become further congested with private driveways and housing developments, is essential to transportation on the coast. Highway 101 is the only lifeline for all communities, and it is essential to have an overall planning system that takes coastal transportation into account.

Sanitation infrastructure on the coast, whether urban or rural, is already in a shaky state, due to porous soils, unstable landforms and insufficient funding for necessary upgrades. In addition, many coastal areas suffer from old and leaking private septic systems, which then pollute groundwater, lakes and streams. The Clatsop Plains, Dunes City-Woahink Lake, and the Garrison Lake area (in Curry County) are three good examples of leaking septic and sanitary infrastructure failure. Providing more resources via land use planning is the solution to these problems, not eliminating existing requirements.

Proponents might argue that SB 25 is a limited and localized loophole, but this is a false argument. It would surely not remain so for long as other counties, also declining in population (or not growing fast enough by some standard), sought to take advantage of the opportunity to rezone resource lands for nearly any purpose.

Oregon Coast Alliance urges the Committee not to pass SB 25. It is not conducive to a healthy, productive and livable Oregon. It would also provide a framework by which to create unparalleled opportunities to destroy the coast's wildlife, riparian and wetland habitats, agriculture, infrastructure and transportation networks on which all residents depend.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cameron La Follette

Cameron La Follette
Executive Director