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To: Members of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water
From: Rhett Lawrence, Oregon Chapter Sierra Club
Date: March 5, 2015
RE: House Bills 2674 and 2675

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee: On behalf of the more than 20,000 members and supporters of the Sierra Club in Oregon, I am pleased to offer some written testimony on House Bills 2674 and 2675. Thank you for considering my comments.

As an organization that has closely followed the debate over genetically engineered crops and commodities in Oregon, we are generally supportive of the concepts put forth in these bills. As you know, HB 2674 would, among other things, require the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) to establish control areas for growing commodities that are genetically engineered (GE). Similarly, HB 2675 would allow ODA to designate crop production areas for some proprietary GE crops and to establish reserve areas where all production of GE crops is prohibited.

Despite the directives of Senate Bill 863 from the 2013 special session that the regulation of GE crops should be under the “exclusive regulatory power” of the state, ODA appears not to believe it has such authority, leaving many organic and other non-GE farmers at risk from poorly regulated GE crops. Additionally, the GE task force convened by Governor Kitzhaber after SB 863 identified a number of key policy considerations that needed to be dealt with, including the need to clarify the role of the state in regulating GE crops, the need to protect Oregon's organic and other non-GE markets, and filling in Oregon-specific data gaps regarding GE crops. We believe the Legislature needs to act now to resolve these issues, and House Bills 2674 and 2675 are a good start at an attempt to do so.

ODA already has one control area for a GE variety of bentgrass, banning it from the Willamette Valley and restricting its growth in Central Oregon to protect wild bentgrass varieties and the grass seed industry. HB 2674 would give ODA the authority to use similar control areas to restrict other open-pollinated GE crops that can cross with wild plants or damage organic and other seed supplies. In addition, allowing for the establishment of control areas or other designations where GE crops could be regulated would help ODA to set science-based and crop or region specific rules.

The concept behind HB 2675 is also a good one. We believe that suppliers of GE seed should be required to inform ODA how much of it is being sold in Oregon, what varieties are being grown, and where it is being grown. Given that Oregon's biggest crops are non-GE and have no genetically engineered counterpart, both our export and organic markets need to be reliably GE-free for them to thrive. Giving ODA the ability to know how much and where GE crops are grown will also allow the

agency to make informed policy choices about where control areas and other management approaches would be most appropriate.

Notwithstanding all of the above, we understand that there may be some troubling amendments that could be proposed for these bills. Obviously, our support for the general concepts behind HB 2674 and HB 2675 could be significantly altered, depending on the form such amendments might take. So we will be monitoring this legislation closely as it progresses and we urge this Committee also to closely analyze any future alterations. Thank you very much for considering my comments and please let me know if I can be of further assistance to the Committee.