



March 17, 2015

Rep. Brad Witt, Chair
House Agriculture and
Natural Resources Committee

House Bill 3334

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) is in support of House Bill 3334.

It is OACD's responsibility to represent and support **all** Districts and speak for them and with them about their abilities and needs in meeting their mandated roles and responsibilities. OACD represents the forty-five Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in Oregon inclusive of the eleven SWCDs in seven counties covering the range of the Greater Sage Grouse in Oregon.

House Bill 3334 is one of many efforts to show Oregon is fully committed to doing everything practically possible to address the habitat needs of the Greater Sage Grouse while maintaining and enhancing the economic sustainability of agriculture in the region. It is hoped this commitment will help preclude listing by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). There are numerous efforts to forestall listing or if not possible to provide for landowner participation in programs providing enrollment assistance in Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs).

Funds placed in the Flexible Incentives Account by HB 3334 would further compliment the funds already expended and funds currently being offered to address the listing issue. The following funding is secured over the next five years to provide technical and financial assistance through SWCDs: USFWS-\$91,250, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) -\$230,000, NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) - \$9,000,000. The NRCS funding requires a one to one match of dollars or in-kind services for its programs. SWCDs, counties, state and federal agencies, other conservation groups, and most importantly landowners have committed approximately \$10.4 million in cash or in-kind as match.

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HB 3334 would require the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) to expend those funds to address Greater Sage Grouse habitat needs. The requirement compliments OWEB's current efforts to establish a redesigned Focus Investment Program (FIP) having as one of its priorities a Sagebrush/Sage-Steppe component. Districts have successfully competed for grants to address Greater Sage Grouse habitat needs through the current OWEB process. Since 2001 Districts have been awarded \$8,057,462, in 275 grants, at 313 sites, addressing needs on 96,633 acres.

The additional funding source envisioned by HB 3334 will supplement the current OWEB Conservation Grant program and further strengthen the intricate partnerships that have brought the cited funding and opportunities to Oregon.

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts appreciates your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jerry Nicolescu". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Jerry Nicolescu
Director