



March 17, 2015

Representative Brad Witt, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature

Testimony for HB 3334

Watershed councils and land trusts work with willing landowners to accomplish voluntary conservation and restoration across Oregon. Collectively, these groups strongly support conservation efforts for sage grouse and recognize the importance of dedicated funding for this cause. However, we have concerns about the potential unintended impact HB 3334 may have on OWEB's programs.

OWEB programs support a unique and responsive model that enables community-based organizations to build partnerships and leverage resources to address critical conservation needs statewide. By drawing funds from existing OWEB programs, HB 3334 could set a precedence that ultimately undermines the flexibility and responsiveness of the Agency's grant programs to address many of the state's critical natural resource needs, including sage grouse.

Sage grouse conservation provides a salient example of OWEB's programs at work. Since 2001, OWEB has granted over \$8M that has been leveraged to complete restoration projects on over 96,000 acres of sage grouse habitat in Oregon. Additionally, OWEB has provided over \$600K in technical assistance (TA) to support planning efforts around sage grouse conservation. A good portion of this TA funding has helped our partner, the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, secure over \$9M in federal funding for sage grouse conservation in Oregon. This funding has been matched by over \$10M in cash and in-kind support from soil and water conservation districts and other partners. OWEB support has already attracted a substantial investment in sage grouse conservation.

OWEB is also in the process of refocusing some of its grant programs so they can be more responsive to statewide needs. Specifically, the Agency is creating a new Focused Investment Partnership (FIP) program that would make funding available to address critically identified regional and statewide conservation needs. Sage grouse habitat is a very likely focus of this program and, with significant partnerships and investment already in place, existing regional groups are likely to benefit from this new program. The FIP program is positioned to provide the kind of support HB 3334 intends.

We fully recognize the importance of demonstrating the State's commitment to sage grouse restoration. We also understand the impact that a potential sage grouse ESA listing could have on an important part of Oregon's economy. We are supportive of identifying additional funds for sage grouse habitat restoration, but concerned about the potential impact of HB 3334 on OWEB's programs. Thus far, OWEB funds have played a central role in leveraging significant investment in sage grouse habitat statewide, which we feel sends a strong statement about the state's commitment to this – and other – important natural resource issues. OWEB's investments represent a unique opportunity to proactively protect and conserve critical habitat statewide, while supporting communities and the economy.

We appreciate your time and consideration,



Ryan Gordon, Executive Director, Network of Oregon Watershed Councils
ryan@oregonwatersheds.org

The Network of Oregon Watershed Councils is dedicated to supporting the work of nearly 90 watershed councils throughout the state by increasing council capacity, improving key relationships, and promoting public awareness of watersheds and watershed councils.



Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts
kelley@oregonlandtrusts.org

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) serves and strengthens the land trust community in Oregon. COLT's 19 member land trusts work with voluntary private land owners to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, preserve open lands, maintain working farms and retain the values that make Oregon such an attractive place to live. COLT focuses on improving and advancing land conservation in the state through increased land trust capacity and coverage, engagement of stakeholders, defending and developing new and larger sources of funding, and supportive policies.

