



HARNEY COUNTY COURT

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Greetings

Chair Witt, and members of the committee:

For the record I am Steve Grasty, Harney County Judge. I would like to begin by thanking you for allowing this testimony via video. It is a rare opportunity for the citizens of this county to be able to participate with our state government without investing 10 hours of driving. So again thanks for use of this technology.

Today you are accepting testimony of a bill which could have tremendous impacts on the fragile community here in Harney County and all of SE Oregon. I want to quickly ground you in the situation we face today. Our county unemployment rate stands at 9.1% or 150% of the statewide average, and 23.4% of our families fall below the national poverty rate. The current drought conditions are causing the one economic driver we have left in the community to reduce its primary asset, cattle. And we are faced with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service having to decide whether or not to place the Greater Sage Grouse on the Federal Endangered Species List by early this fall. Things are tough but we are survivors.

The people who live in this county believe that the challenges brought about by endangered species listings can best be addressed by the people most impacted, by the very people who are positioned to provide solutions and in this case by us. With the leadership of the Harney SWCD in this county alone we have secured conservation agreements on hundreds of thousands of acres of private land by collaborating with the private land owners and with the USFWS. This effort will formally begin to occur in six other Oregon counties beginning tomorrow. While these agreements will provide each of those land owners some protections it is not the complete answer to preventing a listing in Oregon.

If listed, land designated sage grouse "core habitat" (both public and private) will be subject to substantial federal restrictions on use. These restrictions would affect cattle grazing, mining, utility corridors, roads, fencing, and recreational activities on millions of acres of Eastern Oregon lands. U.S. Fish and Wildlife has indicated that a "dedicated funding stream for grouse habitat restoration would reduce the chance of listing.

Without the commitment of the state enabled in HB3334 the same types of dire consequences that occurred in local areas after the listing of spotted owl in southern Oregon. The towns of Burns and Hines are economically dependent upon our residents. While some visitation certainly occurs reductions in any area of our economy are immediately apparent here. 130 miles to the next larger town does make us interdependent on each other. Our small businesses who depend on the agriculture economy will be impacted. Our irrigation suppliers could be faced with layoffs as a result of downsizing of ag businesses, our veterinary businesses would face reductions in business for the same reasons. The gas stations, downtown retail businesses, metal fabrication business, maybe even the movie theatre and restaurants will see a downturn as a result of restrictions on the few economic opportunities we have.

WE have stepped up and set the stage for local participation, for local collaborative decision making and for a process where our community can provide the continued solutions for the wildlife so important to all of us who live in SE Oregon and for our communities. What we need from the state is a commitment to partner with us and to demonstrate to the USFWS that ALL of us in this state want to be seen as the solution in preventing a listing of the Greater Sage Grouse in this state. Please pass HB 3334 out of this committee.

Sincerely

Steven Grasty, Harney County Judge

March 17, 2015