



April 13, 2015

Senator Chris Edwards, Chair
Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature

Testimony for SB 204

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.

The 19 members of COLT are committed to the long-term health and sustainability of agriculture in Oregon and have a strong record of building collaborative relationships with working forest, farm and ranch landowners in Oregon. Land trusts work to help landowners achieve their needs, while also achieving important public objectives, which ultimately serve to reduce regulatory pressures on all landowners.

Task Force on Working Farms and Forests

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts supports the creation of a working farms and forest task force in Oregon. This task force will foster a conversation to better understand some of the underlying problems faced by rural communities in Oregon and evaluate tools to support working farms, forests and ranches that also provide important ecological benefits.

In particular, COLT supports task force objective 'C' to:

“Study and evaluate potential tools for state government to help private landowners maintain land as active working farms or forests while accomplishing conservation benefits on those lands, including but not limited to easements, tax incentives, grants and loans.”

Conservation easements are the most flexible instrument for transferring rights according to the wishes and needs of the landowner. Right now, Oregon lacks a state-side program to support conservation easements on working lands and complement federal easement programs like USDA's Agricultural Conservation

Easement Program (ACEP) or the USDA Forest Legacy Program that assists states and private forest owners in maintaining working forestlands threatened with conversion to non-forest uses related to urbanization, rural residential development, and other development pressures.

COLT hopes the task force will address this critical need while also supporting the needs of landowners across the state. We envision ourselves as a partner in helping maintain the vitality of communities across the state and appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelley Beamer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelley Beamer, Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts