



April 13, 2015

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

### **Support for SB 204**

The Network of Oregon Watershed Councils (NOWC) and Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) work in partnership to support the efforts of nearly 90 watershed councils and 45 soil and water conservation districts statewide. We collectively support the proposed amendments to SB 204, which would create both a Task Force on Working Farms & Forests and a Clean Water Fund to support critical conservation efforts.

#### **Task Force on Working Farms & Forests**

We support the creation of a Working Farms and Forest Task Force. 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 and social benefits. As primary ground-level implementers of many state and federal conservation programs, we appreciate the opportunity to participate in conversations around these challenges and opportunities. While we would like to see Task Force membership expanded to directly include councils and land trusts, through our partnership, we are committed to bringing these important perspectives to the conversation.

The proposed Task Force would also address an important and ongoing conversation about impacts from conservation projects on adjacent landowners. This issue was most recently heard before this Committee in SB 544 and SB 956. We believe it is important to address these concerns, and feel the proposed Task Force is an appropriate mechanism to develop solutions at a local or regional – as opposed to statewide – level.

#### **Clean Water Fund**

We also support creation of a Clean Water Fund, which would provide important resources to complement and expand existing tools for conservation in riparian areas, particularly on agricultural lands. Districts and councils have a long history of leveraging funds to accomplish conservation work statewide. For example, districts and councils have long matched OWEB funding with USDA-sponsored Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) dollars for riparian restoration. The proposed Fund would augment existing federal programs, allowing districts and councils to build projects with more longevity and greater ecological uplift.



### **Additional Suggestion – Clean Water Fund**

In reviewing the proposed amendments for the Clean Water Fund, we noted the text refers to “achievement of proper functioning condition” (p. 5, lines 8-9). While this is certainly the desired endpoint for a conservation program, we believe it is important the text recognize such conditions cannot be immediately achieved through implementation of the program. We feel the Clean Water Fund is an investment in incremental improvements leading toward restoration of proper functioning condition.

We appreciate your time and consideration,

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