



## WILLAMETTE PARTNERSHIP

Monday, April 13, 2015

Testimony to Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on Senate Bill 204

The Willamette Partnership has a conservation mission—to expand the pace, scope, and effectiveness of conservation – and has pursued that interest in its last 10 years of work on habitat and water incentives and ecosystem markets. The Partnership’s Board represents a diversity of interests across business, environmental groups, agriculture, tribal government, academic institutions, and local government. That diversity underpins a balanced approach to conservation that strives for solutions that will build resilient and sustainable communities.

We support SB 204. As Oregon continues to grow, working lands will play an increasingly important role. We need to find ways to protect working lands for the multiple values they produce—food, shelter, clean water, clean air, and natural places to play. SB 204, and the Clean Water Fund, will be an important part of this effort.

We support the Clean Water Fund, and its ability to accept contributions from any source. This will let the state leverage dollars from utilities, transportation departments, and private foundations. We support keeping the Clean Water Fund broadly focused, not limited to just riparian improvement. The Clean Water Fund should be available to fund the types of actions identified as most important by local communities. This could include cattle watering stations, forest road maintenance, or improvement of stream crossings—all important actions for clean water, and all supportive of viable working lands.

We recommend against limiting the Clean Water Fund to funding capital improvements. Contributors to the fund may require their own restrictions, but SB 204 should provide the room needed to fund the maintenance and monitoring appropriate and necessary to supporting long-term agreements. For example, if the Clean Water Fund pays for trees, but no one to take care of those trees for 20 years, the young trees would likely be taken over by blackberries, eaten by deer, or otherwise fail to deliver their promised benefit.

We recommend the bill direct the Working Forests and Farms Advisory Committee to explore the root causes of conversion of working farms and forests. While conservation uses may play a role, the decisions of individual landowners to sell off a farm, ranch, or small woodland rather than pass it on to the next generation may have more to do with tax law, the proximity of good schools, or health care costs. SB 204, and any working lands strategy, needs to focus on the goal of viable working lands and production of multiple values. It may be counter-productive to focus the Working Farms and Forests Advisory Committee on conflicts between conservation and working lands, when in most cases, they are supporting similar goals.

We applaud the state’s efforts to address the need for innovative incentives to maintain healthy working lands and ecosystems. Please feel to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Bobby Cochran,

Executive Director