



April 14, 2015

To: Representative Brian Clem and members of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use, and Water

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee,

The Hermiston Government Affairs Team supports HB 2508. Our priorities include economic development, jobs and education.

The Hermiston Government Affairs Team is aware that our high-value agricultural lands seen to be of critical economic importance to northeastern Oregon, including our business and agriculture community are threatened by multiple high voltage transmission lines and other energy facility proposals currently being considered in our region. While we do not oppose these facilities in particular or energy development in general, we seek your help in memorializing the legal sideboards that would allow our local region to ensure that planning in conjunction with the energy facility siting process is commensurate with agriculture's role in Oregon's economy and Oregon's history of meaningful and consistent land use planning. HB 2508 is consistent with laws governing other non-farm uses under Oregon land use law and would provide those legal sideboards for meaningful planning and protection of the land base that supports our entire economy.

Many proposed transmission line locations are over some of Oregon's most scarce, valuable, and irreplaceable irrigated farmland and are also unacceptably close to new and expanding dairies and other critical value-added support industries in the region. The proposed locations create irreparable and ongoing adverse impacts directly on irrigated agriculture, dairy and value-added operations and indirectly on the economies of the regions dependent on that base. Despite Oregon agriculture's prominence, economic contributions, and legal safeguards, the formal and informal energy and transmission siting decisions to date have ignored any serious identification and evaluation of individual and cumulative adverse impacts on irrigated farming, dairy operations and the economies they have fostered and enhanced.

Fortunately, these adverse impacts are avoidable and mutually beneficial facility siting is possible. Relatively minor relocations of transmission lines and substations could avoid almost all adverse impacts on irrigated agriculture, dairy and other value-added operations without any material adverse impacts on the overall projects. The only way to ensure this avoidance is with proactive planning between state and local partners. We believe that HB 2508 provides the legal vehicle to ensure that planning takes place and that alternatives are considered first, before a permanent decision is made to impact Oregon's irreplaceable high-value land base.

Our region is willing and committed to participate in a local or regional planning that ensures avoidance of lands of critical importance to the regional economy. We recognize that without such planning and coordination we must consider other avenues to prevent the broad latitude that allows energy developers to arbitrarily discount – and in some instances ignore – adverse agricultural impacts and shift costs to agricultural land owners, operators and the economy that relies on them through no fault of their own.

Evaluation of the immediate and long-term cumulative effects on agriculture should be considered. Transparency of the costs and benefits of alternative locations and balancing of the relative costs of alternative sites between the energy industry and the agricultural industry should be considered. Areas benefiting from the specific infrastructure improvements and investment need to bear an appropriate and shared burden as appropriate. HB 2508 can ensure that this may happen.

For these reasons, we ask that you understand that a substantive role for agricultural based regions should be included in pending and future energy facility siting decisions. Specifically, we believe that Oregon's energy facility siting process require

1. The identification and evaluation of short-term and long-term adverse impacts on agriculture on an individual project basis and on a cumulative basis,
2. The identification and evaluation of alternatives to facility siting on, over, across, and adjacent to high value irrigated farmland and dairies, and
3. Justification of any decisions to site facilities on, over, across, and adjacent high value irrigated farmland and dairies by balancing the consequences of alternative sites between the energy industry and the agricultural based economies.

We ask for your support to assist us in ensuring an effort towards cumulative benefit and that you direct your staff to work with our region to ensure proper planning and consideration of direct and cumulative adverse impacts on lands of critical economic importance to our region. We acknowledge the delicate balance necessary to ensure economic development in all regions and on all fronts and are willing to work with EFSC, appropriate staff and appropriate entities to ensure impacts are minimized and Oregon's economy is maximized. Absent passage of HB 2508 we do not believe that a legal vehicle exists to ensure that our commitment will be matched by those with the power of eminent domain who are wishing to locate overhead transmission lines through our most valuable and irreplaceable agricultural land base. HB 2508 provides that vehicle.

Thank you in advance for your consideration HB 2508. We urge.

Best Regards,

Art Kegler


Chairman

Hermiston Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Team