



**TESTIMONY**  
**Oregon Farm Bureau**

**Subcommittee on Capital Construction**  
**Lower Deschutes River Acquisition**

**May 29, 2015**

Co-Chairs Kotek and Girod and Members of the Committee:

Oregon Farm Bureau urges you to oppose authorization for ODFW to purchase a 10,000 acre ranch in Wasco County, Oregon. By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau is a voluntary, grassroots, nonprofit agricultural organization representing Oregon's farmers and ranchers in the public and policymaking arena. As Oregon's largest general farm organization, its primary goal is to promote educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement for its members and the farming, ranching, and natural resources industry as a whole. Today, Oregon Farm Bureau represents over 7,000 member families professionally engaged in the industry and has a total membership of over 60,000 families.

Oregon Farm Bureau opposes the authorization for ODFW to receive federal funding to acquire this property. In addition to being contrary to our policies against public acquisition of private land, we are concerned about the impact of the acquisition on the neighboring ranches. Opening formerly private land up to public use creates a host of management issues, including trespass, increased risk of vandalism (shot water tanks, broken fence and gates, and occasionally even shot cattle), and increased management headache due to gates left open and fences let down. The acquisition will also encourage increased use of adjacent public lands, creating the same management concerns for the neighboring federal permittees.

Additionally, we are concerned about ODFW having the ability to properly manage and operate the property and control public use and access, particularly if they do not have any additional funding dedicated to that purpose. Our members tell us that ODFW has difficulty managing the properties they own currently; they should not be acquiring additional property. These management failures have already increased the costs of operation to

neighboring farmers and ranchers, and we urge the legislature to stop this trend and require the agency to better manage its existing properties before acquiring new properties.

Please contact Mary Anne Nash with any questions.

Oregon Farm Bureau believes it is appropriate to require recreational trails within existing rights of way to go through the conditional use process. In the last several years, we have seen a movement toward using the “rails to trails” concept to transition old railroad rights of way to recreational trails. The difference between railroad use through farmland and recreational trail use through farmland is significant, and farmers must be provided with a forum to raise concerns about conflicts before a trail is constructed.

In areas devoted to agricultural use, farming uses include irrigation, tilling, spraying, and harvesting crops. Putting a recreation trail through the middle of these operations creates a host of concerns and issues that are not present with railroad or motor vehicle use. Recreation areas are typically viewed by the public as places of solitude, set apart from any activities that require intensive land management. People travel either by foot or bicycle on recreational trails, putting them in much closer contact with the farming operations than the railroad or motor vehicle use, and creating a much higher likelihood of conflict. Recreational trails also create a much larger risk for trespass onto private farmland. This bill is designed to ensure that all new recreational trails on EFU land, regardless of the previous use of the land, are subject to the conditional use process, so that farmers can raise any concerns about conflicts and compatibility before the trail is constructed.

We understand that Metro will be offering amendments that would require a conditional use permit only when condemnation powers are used to acquire the property that the trail will be located on. These amendments are contrary to existing law, and would deny farmers the ability to raise impacts with projects that have the potential to significantly impact their operations. These amendments would be particularly troubling for the several “rails to trails” projects that are proposed throughout Oregon, as those projects often occur through the purchase of railroad rights of way, and do not require any negotiation or consultation with the neighboring landowners whose property would be impacted by the trail. Given the significant impacts these projects can have on farming operations, it is critical that farmers have the ability to raise concerns about impacts from the paths before the paths are constructed, enabling the county and project proponent to design the project to avoid or mitigate those impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue. Please contact Mary Anne Nash with any questions about this testimony.

April 22, 2015

Wasco County Commissioners  
County Government Office  
511 Washington Street, #302  
The Dalles, Oregon 97058

Dear County Commissioners,

We are writing to express our concern over the acquisition of the Limmeroth Ranch property by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for use as a recreational area, and ask that the County oppose the acquisition.

As you are aware, the ODFW, through the Trust for Public Lands, is seeking to acquire approximately 10,000 acres of ranch land in Wasco County. ODFW plans to add this land to the existing Lower Deschutes Wildlife Area, over doubling the size of this wildlife reserve. The property will be open to the public for hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing, and will apparently include an established day use park, which without funds for supervision or management could easily be used for overnight camping. Acquisition of the Limmeroth Ranch property would also open up public access to thousands of acres of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management, which currently does not provide for easy public access and which we rely on to graze our cattle and maintain viable ranching operations. We believe that ODFW's use and management of the land will create serious conflicts for our ranching operations, and we are against this expansion of public ownership in Wasco County.

The Limmeroth Ranch has been part of a working cattle ranch for decades, and has been a big part of the ranching fiber of this community. The property was originally listed for sale in 2011. It appears that ODFW's interest in the property began with its initial listing, with the Trust of Public Lands engaging in the acquisition in 2013. We understand that two private offers were made on the property, but were rejected as too low. The general feeling of the ranching community is that the appraised value for the property was far above its actual market value as a working ranch, and competition against a well-funded ODFW and Trust for Public Lands was a strong motivator for the family to hold out for a higher price, effectively limiting the market for this property to public agencies or trusts willing to pay a premium. While we certainly support ranchers making a profit from the sale of their properties, the entry of public entities into the private market for ranches causes price inflation in the area and puts area ranchers interested in purchasing the property at a competitive disadvantage.

As the neighboring landowners to the Limmeroth ranch, we are very concerned about the impacts that the sale of the ranch and conversion of the ranch to public use. While we understand that ODFW is going to endeavor to maintain some level of ranching on the property after its sale, that use will be secondary to the public uses intended for the ranch, and we have concerns that use will not be maintained in the events of any conflicts with the primary public

use. There are also valuable BLM permits associated with the Limmeroth ranch. We are concerned that the value of these permits will be lost instead of being maintained as part of a working cattle ranch.

We are also concerned that this project will have detrimental impacts on neighboring farm and ranch operations, making it more difficult to maintain a working landscape and keep our ranch land in production. Increased public access to our ranch land creates a host of management issues resulting from increased public use near our closely managed ranching operations. These conflicts include increased risk of trespass, increased costs due to the need for more frequent oversight of livestock and farming operations, and the risk of harm to livestock through gates being left open, animals being chased or shot, water troughs being vandalized, and other critical infrastructure being damaged. Due to the remote nature of these operations, it is not possible for us to monitor our lands or cattle at all times. With significantly increased public traffic in the area, the costs of this access to our operations will be real, and will make it more difficult for us to maintain productive working ranches.

It is for these reasons that we have been working with the Oregon Farm Bureau and the Wasco County Farm Bureau to oppose this acquisition. We ask that the county commission help protect Oregon's ranch land for agricultural use, and oppose this project in your county.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact any of the landowners indicated below with any questions. We are also working with Mary Anne Nash at the Oregon Farm Bureau on this acquisition, and you can contact her with any questions at 541-740-4062 or [Maryanne@oregonfb.org](mailto:Maryanne@oregonfb.org).

Sincerely,

*Bob + Nancy Hammel*

Cc:

Mary Anne Nash, Oregon Farm Bureau  
Curt Melcher, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Senator Ted Ferrioli, Oregon State Senate  
Senator Bill Hansell, Oregon State Senate  
Representative Greg Smith, Oregon House of Representatives  
Representative John Huffman, Oregon House of Representatives  
Diane Daggett, Trust for Public Lands

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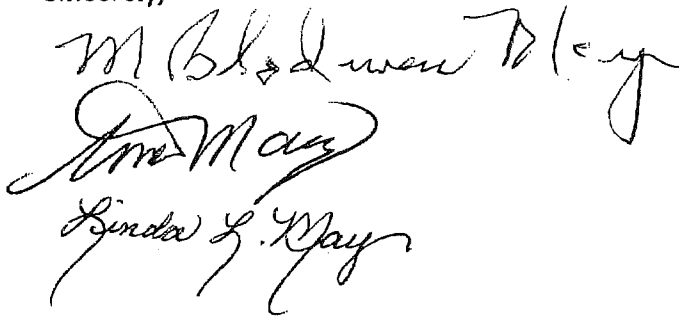
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M. Blodwen May  
Linda L. May

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