



Wheeler County

County Court

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Oregon State Senate
Environment and Natural Resources Committee
Oregon State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

February 9, 2016

RE: Senate Bill 1588

Dear Committee Members:

It was the consensus of the Wheeler County Court on February 3, 2016 that Wheeler County is in full support of Senate Bill 1588. This bill will allow Wheeler County to grow its economy, provide jobs, put children in schools and increase its assessable tax base.

Since the timber industry shut down in 1978, Wheeler County has experienced a 47% decline in population. Wheeler County has 1.1 million acres, 778,000 privately owned with 68% zoned Exclusive Farm Use, and 27% zoned Exclusive Timber Use. With no transmission lines available for wind projects, no Interstate for transport, no river traffic, and no rail lines, our economy continues to falter from a declining population.

Wheeler County has incredible natural resources that support a robust tourism industry and we are vigilant in protecting those resources. Land Use Planning should foster economic growth tailored to the unique landscape and population within each region of the State, while recognizing those vast differences that exist throughout the State. These are the very characteristics that make us attractive to so many.

It is extremely difficult for us to compete with many of our neighboring counties for industries that rely on some form of transportation to move products as well as the increased utility carrying capacity, both of which we do not have. One size does not fit all; especially when we try to compare a county of 1500 people per square mile and composed of prime farmland to a county with a total population of 1,500 with less than one person per square mile that has little to no prime farmland.

Urban sprawl is not a problem in Eastern Oregon. In fact, our declining population continues to contribute to less and less commercial goods and services being offered. There is no single industry that can be relied upon to bring additional population to Wheeler County. However, we have a strong demand for small, buildable parcels that families can live a self-sustaining lifestyle while working in a telecommuting capacity. Unfortunately, the land use rules meant to preserve prime agricultural lands are the same rules that are strangling the small, remote populations of this State. We would urge the State to afford all communities a level playing field.

Respectfully submitted,

Patrick C. Perry
Wheeler County Judge