



## Tillamook County: Collaborative Conservation Pilot Project SB 1517A6

**Summary of Proposed Legislation:** SB 1517A, as modified by the -6 Amendments, creates a pilot program which authorizes Tillamook County to create a collaborative process to facilitate local input and involvement in wetlands restoration projects that are sited in the County.

It contains three primary provisions: 1) it gives Tillamook County the option for local approval of wetlands projects sited in exclusive farm use zones to ensure that the project will not impact nearby agricultural operations; 2) it allows Tillamook County to create a collaborative process that a project applicant can choose to use to achieve agreement regarding conditions necessary to protect neighboring agricultural operations; and 3) it allows Tillamook County to enter into a planning process involving a diverse group of stakeholders that will allow the County to more effectively plan priority areas for restoration and priority areas where the maintenance of agricultural operations will be protected. The pilot project sunsets in 10 years.

**Explanation of Issue:** Due to very wet conditions most of the year, the ability to maintain adequate drainage on their farm fields is critical to Tillamook County farmers. In recent years, there has been an increase in the construction of wetlands in some agricultural areas in Tillamook County. In some cases, these wetlands alter the drainage patterns in the area around the project and can create unacceptable flooding issues on neighboring farms. Given that farmers in wetland areas already struggle to combat flooding in wet years, these projects can drastically decrease the productivity of impacted farms. This issue has created concern among the local dairy farmers – most of whom have been in the area for generations – who in some cases have found themselves competing with conservation groups for agricultural land to continue to run their operations.

The dairy industry forms the backbone of the economy in Tillamook County, and it is essential that these operations continue to be able to coexist with local conservation projects while maintaining the functioning agricultural land base they need to be successful. The dairy industry in Tillamook County has a long history of collaborative conservation – they have partnered on a number of significant habitat wetlands restoration and Coho habitat improvement projects with conservation community within the County, and plan to continue to be collaborative partners on these projects in the future. Through this bill, the County and the local agricultural community seek to have greater local input into the design of these projects to ensure that they do not have impacts on productive agricultural land while continuing to provide valuable fisheries and wildlife improvements desired in the county.

Presently, wetlands projects do not require review under Oregon land use laws for impacts to neighboring agricultural operations. As a result, some wetlands projects are not being designed with an eye toward minimizing impacts to neighboring agricultural operations, particularly in regard to hydrologic impacts from the project. This bill seeks to provide for local involvement in these important restoration decisions. Our proposed legislation is designed to address these issues and ensure that farmers in Tillamook County can continue to be collaborative partners in conservation while maintaining their farming operations. We hope you'll support this legislation.

Please contact Tammy Denne, Mary Anne Nash, or Jerome Rosa with any questions.