



February 23, 2016

Representative Brad Witt, Chair  
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Oregon State Legislature

**Testimony on SB 1517-A- OPPOSED**  
**The Wetlands Conservancy**

As the Executive Director of The Wetlands Conservancy, a 35-year-old Oregon non-profit with a mission of conserving Oregon's Greatest Wetlands, I am concerned with SB 1517. Healthy thriving agricultural production and healthy thriving wetlands are essential to human health, environmental health and social wellbeing. Ensuring the vitality of both is critical to Oregon's future.

Wetlands are essential to human health and the health of our environment. They clean and recharge our water supply, provide critical fish and wildlife habitat, and protect our communities from floods. Agricultural production is essential to Oregon's economy, social structure and the health and prosperity of Oregonians and an ever-increasing percentage of the world's citizens.

Our land use system should reflect the equal value of wetlands and agricultural production. Therefore, we oppose any change in land use statute that alters the current status of wetlands. However, we recognize that there are times when conflicts arise between the two uses, and our regulatory system for siting and permitting wetlands within agricultural lands may not be meeting the needs of all stakeholders and communities.

As introduced, SB1517 would require county approval for any wetland restoration on agricultural lands. As introduced the bill would require a landowner who wants to grow wetlands to go through the land use process to get a conditional use permit. We feel that the processes offered in SB 1517 will add more complexity, confusion and cost rather than promoting collaborative approaches to supporting conservation of Oregon's wetlands and agricultural economy. As amended by the Senate Environment Committee, the bill now narrows this requirement to Tillamook County under a 10-year pilot program.

The Wetlands Conservancy has worked on a variety of wetland restoration projects on private lands in rural Oregon counties. For each project we have obtained permits from Dept. of State Lands and sometimes DEQ which both require the sign off of the county planning department and providing a list with the names and addresses of all neighbors to the subject property. Along the way we have discussed the projects with our neighbors and county staff and when there have been problems, we have worked through collaboration and conversation to address them. Those conversations have sometimes resulted in changes and improvements to the projects.

Rather than altering the status of wetlands in land use law and creating an additional layer of process, we should examine the existing processes within the Department of State Lands and determine whether changes can be made to address the concerns raised by the proponents of SB 1517. We support an Oregon Solutions/ Consensus process to both amend the DSL process if possible and convene the appropriate parties and produce a proposal for the 2017 session.

Oregon has been a leader in promoting voluntary efforts by private landowners to improve water quality, flood control, habitat, endangered salmon and other native fish and wildlife. Imposing new regulatory requirements on those who are willing to undertake that work would be a big step backwards.

We feel that the processes offered in SB 1517 will add more complexity, confusion and cost rather than promoting collaborative approaches to supporting conservation of Oregon's wetlands and agricultural economy.

Thank you for your consideration and for your attention to this critical issue.

*Esther Lev*

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