Testimony before the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
House Bill 2535 relating to four-year pilot program for pollinator forage
By Jeff Stone, Executive Director, Oregon Association of Nurseries
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Chairman Clem, Vice-Chairs McLain and Sprenger, members of the committee, my name is Jeff Stone and I serve as the Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. We support House Bill 3535 as reasoned policy toward a mutual goal of elimination of noxious weeds with the need for increasing pollinator forages. This testimony should be included with the plethora of materials and efforts the association has made over the last three years to make meaningful headway on the issue of pollinator health in our state and nation.

The Economic Footprint of the Nursery and Greenhouse Industry
The nursery and greenhouse industry is the state's second largest agricultural sector, and ranks as the third largest nursery state in the nation, with over $894 million in sales annually to customers in Oregon, the rest of the United States, and abroad. In fact, nearly 75% of the nursery stock grown in our state leaves our borders – with over half reaching markets east of the Mississippi River. We send ecologically friendly green products out of the state, and bring traded sector dollars back to Oregon.

Nursery association members represent wholesale plant growers, Christmas tree growers, retailers, and greenhouse operators. Our members are located throughout the state, with our largest nursery growing operations found in Clackamas, Marion, Washington, Yamhill and Multnomah Counties.

The Nursery and Greenhouse industry is a committed leader on pollinator health
The OAN and many other organizations have been working hard over the past several years to educate consumers and agricultural sectors, prioritize research and incentives, and bring together agricultural, beekeepers, garden clubs and conservation groups to engage on increasing the populations of native and honey bees along with monarch butterflies.

Pollinating bees are important to sustaining life on our planet. They support our food chain and many plants are dependent on bees for production. The horticulture industry is committed to ensuring their sustainability because of their important role in the life cycle of plants and humans.

House Bill 2535 deserves serious consideration
The establishment of a Pollinator Forage Pilot Program (and fund) is consistent with the efforts made over the past couple of years to address the needs of pollinator health. Collaboration between the Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Oregon Weed Board – both which I am proud to say have nursery grower representatives serving on those boards – is a critical element to achieve success in creating pollinator forage areas. In particular, infestation of noxious weeds is a big problem for the agricultural community and welcome the effort to make some gains on both pollinator health and noxious weed control. The nursery industry grows pollinator friendly plants and will be active in helping the state achieve its goals and measuring the impact over the next four years.

The state took affirmative action in 2014 with House Bill 4139 – which created a task force of stakeholders to collaborate and create a science-based approach to pollinator health which would lead to a better solution. The "Report to the Oregon Legislative Assembly" by the Task Force on Pollinator Health was released in November 2014. The Executive Summary is attached to this testimony. Four main consensus items emerged that received the support of stakeholders. In 2015, the OAN and others advocated for the creation of three bills to enact the recommendations of the task force. They are below:

- **I.** Oregon should develop a strong, effective outreach and education strategy on pollinator health, including best management practices. (House Bill 3362)
- **II.** Oregon should fully fund a state-of-the-art bee health diagnostic facility at Oregon State University. (House Bill 3360**)**
- **III.** An integrated pollinator health research plan should be developed and funded to improve understanding of the many issues affecting pollinator health. (House Bill 3361)
- **IV.** A sustainable revenue stream to fund the proposed outreach, education and research programs is needed.

It is imperative that over the coming years stakeholders roll up their sleeves and work with our land grant university (Oregon State University), legislators, and state agencies to determine the most appropriate paths forward. It is critical we work with interested parties to examine how to study this issue further and create a communication effort for the general public and industry. We all benefit when we move in a reasoned manner to evaluate trends in pollinator health, including the use of best management practices.

House Bill 2535 is a bill worth considering as a legitimate step toward the multitude of win-win options available to improve pollinator health.

Zero tolerance lowers success rate and increases pest and disease risk
We are aware that media attention regarding pollinator health has focused on neonicotinoid insecticides and their potential impact on bees. Many of these stories provide important information for the green industry to consider and reflect upon, while

others represent overstated perspectives with the intention of driving a zero-pesticide-tolerance agenda.

Research and peer-reviewed publications from trusted and legitimate sources, including those from the United States Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency, strongly contradict the finger-pointing at neonicotinoids. Rather, the research suggests that "colony collapse disorder" of managed hives is likely caused by a combination of factors, including the destructive Varroa mite (first found in 1987), bee pathogens, loss of habitat and forage, and the constant stress of transporting hives to far-off locations by beekeepers. Pesticides may play some role in the concerns about pollinator health but are likely to be one relatively small factor in a complex array of challenges. Candidly, agriculture also depend on pesticides as tools to control destructive pests and diseases which can obliterate a market. The nursery industry wants to make sure that protecting bee health, and retaining pesticides as an effective tool, are not mutually exclusive.

Horticulture is the original green industry, and in that spirit, there are steps we can take to be part of the solution and to help encourage healthier pollinator communities. We can be smarter in how, when, and even where we apply insecticides and as an industry we are well-suited to help in creating more habitat and forage opportunities for pollinators. Furthermore, responding proactively will help us preserve insecticide tools that are critical to plant production and pest management, and provide healthier plants and better enjoyment by consumers.

For these reasons, our healthy pollinator initiative has three primary components. Our plan includes the following steps:

1. Developing a bee and pollinator stewardship program that improves the circumstances surrounding pollinator health concerns.
2. Funding research that will help us answer key science questions that support the stewardship program.
3. Spreading the word to our horticulture industry communities and our customers how the program has a positive impact on pollinators and still allows us to mitigate the spread of invasive pests that threaten our natural environment.

National efforts on pollinator health are underway
The OAN is working with many state and national partners on several efforts to make a difference on pollinator health. Below are a few of the projects:

Million Garden Challenge
Our national association, AmericanHort, made the case to the state nursery association executives at our annual meeting that a concerted effort, among eight founding organizations and partners, will create a network of gardens and forage for bees. This is a welcome and positive step to solve an underappreciated aspect of pollinator health. According to the National Pollinator Garden Network - the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge invites participation from organizations and individuals to work toward the

objective to increase nectar and pollen providing landscapes of every size in order to address one of the significant threats to pollinator health – the disappearance of forage for pollinators.

The OAN and many other organizations have been working hard over the past several years to educate consumers and agricultural sectors, prioritize research and incentives, and bring together agricultural, beekeepers, garden clubs and conservation groups to engage on increasing the populations of native and honey bees along with monarch butterflies.

However the biggest impact can be triggered by the public and their love for plant material. Over the next two years, the network of partners will work hard to establish one million gardens to assist in restoring critical pollinator habitat in the United States. Every garden created in America can help. Public, botanical and youth garden projects, business areas and government offices are eligible for monetary awards as incentives if they join the network. Join or not, every neighbor can make a difference and provide nutrition for our honey and native bees.

There is little debate about the role and importance of pollinators to the nursery and greenhouse industry. The industry's garden centers and landscapers are the perfect conduit to provide the general public the tools they need to be part of the million garden challenge. We are a green industry and are the perfect partner for this goal.

Feed a Bee Forage project

Bayer Crop Sciences, in coordination with the new Feed a Bee steering committee, has announced a call for proposals to establish additional forage for pollinators in all 50 states by 2018. Bayer's Feed a Bee program, currently in its third year, has rallied more than 900,000 individuals and 117 partner organizations to plant more than 2 billion wildflowers across the U.S., creating and expanding forage areas for pollinators. Through this new initiative, Feed a Bee will build on the success of the program to fund forage initiatives and plantings for pollinators in every state in the U.S., working with organizations across the nation.

To further the reach of Feed a Bee and contribute to additional forage development, the Feed a Bee Steering Committee, comprised of more than a dozen Feed a Bee partners, including R.D. Offutt Company, Sweet Virginia Foundation, Project Apis m., amongst others, as well as representatives from the Bayer Bee Care Program, will distribute $500,000 in funding over the next two years.

This program will distribute $500,000 in funding over the next two years and is requesting forage initiative proposals that will promote pollinator health and help provide a tangible solution to the current lack of forage. Organizations including, but not limited to, nonprofits, growers (individual and trade groups), beekeepers (individual and associations), businesses, schools, clubs, gardening groups, government agencies, etc. are encouraged to submit a proposal. Forage initiatives in each state must include the following priorities to be considered for funding:

1. *Establishing pollinator forage via a dedicated planting or habitat restoration led by the applying organization.* Examples of activities may include but are not limited to establishing a pollinator garden, increasing acreage of existing forage, management of right of way vegetation, restoration of native habitat land, etc. Location must be viable and able to support pollinator forage plants (wildflowers, ornamentals or trees) and pollinators, including (but not limited to) farms, community/urban gardens, schools, rights-of-way, etc.

2. *Education initiative encouraging others to establish pollinator forage.* Promote pollinator education to third parties, sharing with them the importance of planting diverse, abundant forage to provide pollinators with enough food.

Nursery research initiatives underway

The Horticultural Research Institute, the AmericanHort research foundation, has released new Best Management Practices (BMPs) for Bee Pollinator Health in the Horticulture Industry. Relevant to greenhouse and nursery growers as well as landscape managers, the BMPs were developed by a team of researchers, including those funded directly by HRI, to convey research results to date. They will be updated as the research effort continues. By following BMP guidelines, horticulture can do its part to support pollinator health.

In 2015 the Horticultural Research Institute, in collaboration with AmericanHort, launched the broad-based Horticulture Industry Bee & Pollinator Stewardship Initiative. Through the initiative, HRI directly funded four important research projects, positively influenced millions of dollars in research funding from federal and other sources, launched the Grow Wise, Bee Smart™ website, and helped to launch the Million Pollinator Garden Challenge campaign.

Pollinators as a whole encompass thousands of different species, such as managed honey bees, wild bees, butterflies, birds, and bats. Protection of pollinators in general, and especially bees, continues to be a major concern among the general public and within the green industry. Several culprits have been identified as factors contributing to manage honey bee losses, including Varroa mites, other pests and pathogens, loss of habitat and nutrition, and off-target effects of pesticides. Wild, unmanaged bee populations are thought to be most affected by landscape changes and habitat degradation.

HRI developed the BMPs, which cover greenhouse and nursery production, woody ornamentals, and managed landscapes, with the assistance of researchers and apiarists throughout North America.

Oregon can continue to serve as a model to pass proactive and positive legislation

The "Oregon way" has never been more important to embrace than with pollinator health. Industries have come together over the past three years to provide meaningful and sustainable insight on how to impact pollinator health in a sustainable way. House Bill 2535 is a good bill and should receive your full attention and support.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.