

**Testimony of the Deschutes River Alliance, Northwest Environmental Advocates,
The Conservation Angler, and Willamette Riverkeeper in Opposition to
HB 3249, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program – April 3, 2017**

Representative Clem and Members of the House Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee:

On behalf of the Deschutes River Alliance, Northwest Environmental Advocates, The Conservation Angler, and Willamette Riverkeeper and our members, we urge your vote in opposition to HB 3249. This bill is, first of all, a wasteful expenditure of state revenues at a time when Oregon is cutting essential programs—environmental and otherwise—to the bone and beyond. Our state revenue situation is even more at risk given proposed federal budget cuts, which would further undermine these mandated programs. At such a time it would be utterly irresponsible to fund this proposed new agricultural give-away program.

Some proponents have suggested that under these circumstances, HB 3249 could be passed into law and partially funded, in order to get the Commission off the ground and begin the process of rulemaking. However, it makes no sense in this budget climate to expend limited tax dollars on purely administrative costs.

Second, this bill contains no coherent purpose. At its heart is a purported intent to maintain or possibly enhance so-called “natural resource values,” a principle the bill not only completely fails to define but also suggests is so broad as to include the “social and economic interests” of landowners as well as “energy and human needs considerations.” Proponents say that the bill’s complete lack of clarity and lack of details will be fleshed out during rule making, which will be the Commission’s first order of business. But this is, frankly, absurd. Any rules written by the Commission must be rooted in the purpose established by the statute; the Commission would be outside the law if it established a purpose that differed from the law passed by this body.

Third, there are simply no assurances that the tax dollars this bill proposes to spend on the private estate planning of landowners and other landowner plans will result in any public benefit whatsoever. And, frankly, why should some Oregonians have their estate planning subsidized by the state?

Fourth, if the legislature is interested in addressing agriculture’s effect on the environment it must do so in a coherent fashion and do more than spend money to maintain the status quo. We have been told by its proponents that HB 3249 has nothing to do with improving or even maintaining water quality, despite its language. This inconsistency puts both us and the legislature at a disadvantage in discussing it. But what we do know is that agriculture’s impacts on water quality continues to be a major substantive problem that Oregon has failed to address, undermining the pollution control efforts of all other pollution sources. It is both unfair and short-sighted to regulate polluted runoff from forestry and urban areas and ignore agriculture.

It is equally short-sighted to spend tax dollars on agricultural lands without obtaining any protection for public resources—including but not limited to water quality—in return. HB 3249 is a give-away to maintain the status quo, a status quo that Oregonians can no longer afford.