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March 28, 2017

House Committee on
State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Testimony on HB 3050

Chair Clem and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 3050, a bill addressing solar development on high-value farmland. 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit, membership organization that works with Oregonians to support livable urban and rural communities; protect family farms, forests and natural areas; and provide transportation and housing choice.

In recent years, certain parts of Oregon have seen an uptick in land use applications for large-scale solar facilities on farm or rangeland. The proposed solar facilities have ranged in size from 12-acre to 300-acre facilities. In some cases, approvals are sought for multiple facilities at once, to be located on adjacent properties or in close proximity to each other. We are concerned about the impacts of increasing solar development on Oregon's agricultural lands and farm economies, and in particular, the impacts to high-value farmland.

To use Marion County as an example: In Marion County at least five solar projects have been approved on high-value farmland. Marion County is also the number one county in Oregon for agricultural production, according to the 2017 Report from the Board of Agriculture. The approved solar projects will take at least 60 acres of Oregon's best, most productive farmland out of production.

1000 Friends of Oregon supports development of energy from non-fossil fuel sources, including wind and solar facilities. However, all energy facilities, including those for renewable energy sources, have distinct siting challenges that need to be balanced with other needs and values, including conservation of working farm and forest lands, natural resources, and wildlife habitat. Large-scale solar facilities can extend over large swaths of land, blocking or restricting sun and water, impacting the vegetation and soil beneath, restricting wildlife migration and fragmenting habitat.¹ The increase in large-scale solar arrays on farmland can also have economic impacts on surrounding farm economies, as they can fragment available and contiguous farm and ranchland and impact land values.

Solar development should be sited at or near the point of use or within the built environment, such as on existing industrial sites and otherwise unusable space. The EPA and the American Planning Association encourage development of solar on targeted sites including brownfields, Superfund sites,

¹ For an overview, see Union of Concerned Scientists, Environmental Impacts of Solar Power, http://www.ucsusa.org/clean_energy/our-energy-choices/renewable-energy/environmental-impacts-solar-power.html#.VxMfCTArK70. See also, The Guardian, Solar is Booming but Solar Parks Could Have Unintended Climate Consequences, <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/solar-power-parks-impact-environment-soil-plants-climate>.

RCRA sites, mining sites, landfills, abandoned parcels, parking lots and commercial/industrial rooftops, instead of on farmland and greenspace.²

Oregon's rules governing solar development should direct solar development away from productive farmland and ranchland and towards already-impacted or otherwise unusable and undevelopable land. The current laws governing solar development do not achieve that goal and are not sufficiently protective of Oregon's productive farmland.

HB 3050 will require solar developers who want to build solar on high-value farmland to demonstrate that they have examined other sites and that, for one of several reasons, the proposed site is the only possible location for the development. This process is sometimes referred to as an "alternatives analysis." Please consider the following relating to HB 3050:

- **High-value farmland is Oregon best and most productive agricultural land. It is limited and irreplaceable.**
- **Solar development is not a farm use, it is land-intensive and it takes land out of production for a long period of time. It does not create long-term jobs within a community.**
- **An alternatives analysis is already required for wind farm development on high-value farmland. It should be required for solar too.**
- **HB 3050 is the first step in directing solar development away from Oregon's best farm soils.**

In conclusion, we strongly support HB 3050 and believe it will help Oregon protect its best, most productive farmland, while directing solar development to appropriate sites.

Respectfully submitted,

Meriel L. Darzen
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² See EPA Decision Tree for Siting Solar, http://www.epa.gov/renewableenergyland/docs/solar_decision_tree.pdf; and Recycling Land For Solar Energy Development, American Planning Association, www.planning.org/research/solar.