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March 29, 2017

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Opposition to SB 644 - Makes various changes to laws relating to mining and mineral resources. Exempts certain small mining operations from exclusion certificate requirement. Exempts surface mining operations or exploration activities on federal lands from state bonding requirements if in compliance with federal financial guarantee requirements. Modifies certain permitting fees related to mining operations. Prohibits motorized in-stream placer mining in indigenous anadromous salmonid habitat and waters essential to recovery and conservation of Pacific lamprey, with certain exceptions.

Dear Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

Friends of Marion County is a 501(c)3 farmland protection organization founded in 1998. Our mission is to protect farm and forestland, parks, and open space.

Our organization and its individual members are opposed to SB 644 and request a "NO" vote since this bill would have a major negative change to our land use system.

There are many reasons we oppose this bill. We will list a few.

1. Farming and ranching are hugely important industries in Eastern Oregon. They will be negatively impacted by this bill. SB 644 would allow mining on Eastern Oregon farmland with NO land use review at all and no permit. Counties would have no ability to limit or mitigate the impacts of mining on surrounding farmers and ranching operations. This effectively turns a farmland zone into a farmland AND mining zone.
2. Existing protections of farmland in eastern Oregon should not be traded away for the suction dredge bill. Eastern Oregon farming should be protected consistent with Statewide Land Use Goal 3.
3. Mining CAN be a compatible use with farming and ranching, but sometimes it is not. That is why the current law protects farmland but allows mining as a Conditional Use on farmland.

SB 644 is ill conceived and a real threat to Oregon's landscape. We therefore request a "NO" vote on this measure.

Thank you for your consideration.

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