



OREGON FARM BUREAU TESTIMONY

Joint Subcommittee on Natural Resources

February 13, 2017

HB 5028

Co-Chairs Frederick and Witt and Members of the Subcommittee:

The Oregon Farm Bureau Federation (OFB) writes today to encourage the legislature not to fund new acquisitions of land for Oregon's natural resource agencies, including Oregon Parks and Recreation (OPRD). OPRD is requesting \$1 million in funding for acquisitions through Policy Option Package 106. We ask the subcommittee not to fund this request, particularly to the extent that it could be used to acquire working farmlands.

By way of background, OFB is Oregon's largest grassroots agriculture association, representing 7,000 farming and ranching families across the state. Our mission is to promote educational improvement, economic opportunity, and social advancement for our members and the farming, ranching, and natural resources industry as a whole. OFB has become aware of several instances where the state, including OPRD, has used state funding to acquire agricultural lands for conversion to recreational land. We are concerned about the impacts of these purchases on Oregon's agricultural land base and oppose the conversion of private lands to public ownership. This opposition is particularly strong in a time of budget shortfall, where long-term operations and maintenance budgets remain uncertain, and the state should not be increasing its property holdings.

Oregon is blessed to have productive working lands that produce food and fiber, provide wildlife habitat, preserve open spaces and support family businesses. While OFB understands the public attraction to these open landscapes, we are concerned about state conversion of private agricultural lands to public ownership and access. Acquisition of working landscapes lessens the amount of land available for production, reducing our ability to provide food and fiber for our state and nation. Additionally, acquisition and conversion of land away from the working landscape takes lands off the tax rolls, removes a valuable input into the local community and increases the burden on neighboring lands.

In recent state acquisitions, one of the primary purposes of the project has been to provide recreational opportunities to the public. Negative impacts from public access are one of the primary complaints OFB receives from landowners who border government-owned land, and, unfortunately, one that our members have come to view as inevitable with these types of

projects. There are a host of issues that can arise when public access occurs next to adjacent private lands. Primary among them are damage to crops, livestock and infrastructure from trespass on foot or by vehicle and food safety concerns for food crops who border on recreational area where there is frequent trespass. Additionally, if the conversion involves creating wetlands or altering the drainage on the property, neighboring landowners can experience flooding or changes in hydrology on their property, which can dramatically reduce its productive capacity.

As a policy matter, we believe that Oregon should move away from acquiring working lands (and opening them to public access) as a primary means of achieving conservation and recreation benefits. As a practical matter, our members have told us that the state frequently does not have the means or ability to design, monitor, and manage public access in a manner that avoids impacts on its neighbors. We strongly believe the state should focus on better managing the land it already controls instead of adding to its portfolio.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments. Please contact OFB if you have any questions.

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