

TESTIMONY: GRANT COUNTY FARM BUREAU

HB 2106

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

February 21, 2017

Chair Clem and Members of the Committee:

Grant County Farm Bureau writes today to express concern over the land use changes proposed by HB 2106. We are concerned that the changes will reduce the ability of farmers and ranchers in our county to raise concerns at the local level about negative impacts from mining projects that are proposed to be sited in the County. We ask the Committee not to change current law, which has been allowing mining while ensuring that impacts to neighboring farms and ranches are taken into account.

We want to start by saying that we support the mining industry and welcome additional mining in our county. We think it will bring much-needed revenue and jobs into our county and we look forward to working with the mining interests to develop the mining industry in our county. However, agriculture is the life-blood of Grant County. With over \$25 million in economic value as of 2012, agriculture is the economic driver of the County.

When a mine is going in next to a farm or a ranch, there is some potential for conflicts if the mining operation is not structured correctly. The county land use process gives farmers and ranchers a vehicle to raise those concerns and ensure they are addressed before the project moves forward.

Currently, Oregon law requires that any proposed mining project receive county approval when it is located on land zoned for exclusive farm use. As part of this process, the county must find that the project will not significantly increase the cost of nearby agricultural operations or force a significant change on those operations. If the county finds that there are impacts to farmland, the county will require the mining operation to mitigate those impacts. If the impact cannot be mitigated or the operation won't agree to the mitigation, the permit would not be granted. However, in Grant County, denial of a mining permit is extremely rare. **In fact, of the 25 mining and aggregate projects proposed since 1997, 23 were granted land use approval by the County – a success rate of 92%.**

Under HB 2106, mining would become an "outright permitted use" on land zoned for exclusive farm use, which means that the county would not impose any conditions on the use and mining would be allowed without any county land use findings. While the operation would still be required to get all required state and federal permits, including the permit from DOGAMI and any other permits triggered by the type of operation, these permits do not address impacts to agriculture, and will not ensure that mining operations will not impact farms and ranches.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on HB 2106. We hope you can address our concerns in the legislation, and we look forward to working with the mining industry to help them establish in our county in a manner that ensures that both our industries will be productive into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Thomas', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Jeff Thomas
President, Grant County Farm Bureau