



The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
821 SE 14th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214-2537

tel 503 802-8100

fax 503 802-8199

nature.org/oregon

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Senator Kathleen Taylor & Representative Jeff Reardon (Co-chairs)
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature

Regarding SageCon Facilitation and Support in the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development's 2019-20 budget.

Submitted by: Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Director of Conservation Programs

I submit this testimony on behalf of The Nature Conservancy to express support for **SageCon Facilitation and Support in the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development's (DLCD) 2019-20 budget**. While several programs in the DLCD budget are of importance to The Nature Conservancy, I wish to elaborate on critical support to the conservation of the Greater Sage-grouse in this testimony.

The Nature Conservancy is a global, science-based, non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. Since our founding in Oregon in 1961, we have led one of the largest conservation efforts in the state. We are proud of our conservation track record in Oregon, which includes helping to protect over 511,000 acres of land, 425 miles of rivers and streams, and marine protected areas and reserves covering 9.7% of territorial sea statewide. We have been able to do so with the help of a dynamic board of trustees representing many businesses and communities, and over 70,000 supporters and members in every county in Oregon.

Stabilizing and increasing populations of the Greater Sage-grouse (sage-grouse) across its range are priorities for The Nature Conservancy. Our goals are grounded in science and real collaboration. True to our value of working to ensure nature and people can thrive, our engagement in the sagebrush steppe continues a broader philosophy of engaging collaboratively with development, working lands, local governments and communities to find solutions that enable thriving economies and conservation successes. We have used our capabilities to expand our collective understanding of sage-grouse science, inform the development of land use plans and policies, and to contribute our expertise, built over many decades, of hands-on habitat protection and restoration with public and private landowners. The Nature Conservancy seeks to continue this type of engagement with all partners in this effort.

In Oregon, The Nature Conservancy has been an active participant in the Sage-grouse Conservation Partnership (SageCon) and preceding collaborative efforts co-convened by current and former Oregon Governors, state agencies such as Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW), Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Agriculture Research Service (ARS) and other statewide and local entities. The SageCon partnership directly supported the creation of the Sage-grouse Action Plan for the state of Oregon using the best available science and incorporating the broadest sweep of stakeholder interests possible.

We applaud Governor Brown for including an important request of \$500,000 for the Department of Land Conservation and Development for SageCon Facilitation and Support. This funding request represents the State of Oregon's share of costs for Oregon Consensus and Oregon Solutions programs' support for collaborative sage grouse conservation through the SageCon Partnership.

Oregon and its federal partners share the costs of supporting the SageCon Partnership which is viewed a national model for successful collaboration. The funding will support coordination, technical support and facilitation for the SageCon Coordinating Council, Staff Implementation Team, and the All-County / Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) Coordinating Committee. Effective coordination among SageCon's large and diverse set of stakeholders allows partners to align their efforts for maximum efficiency and effectiveness.

The work of the SageCon partnership has represented an "all lands, all hands" approach for managing Greater Sage-grouse in Oregon by bringing disparate parties together towards a common cause. Despite a population that was once estimated to number 16 million, today, the population of the Greater Sage-grouse has dwindled to 200,000 to 500,000 birds range-wide. The SageCon partnership and the Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan are nationally recognized for helping to keep the Greater Sage-grouse off the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) list, allowing the State of Oregon to continue managing the species without federal regulatory intervention. The USFWS determined in its 2015 non-listing decision that implementation and demonstrated progress was necessary to keep the bird from future listing. By investing in **SageCon Facilitation and Support**, Oregon will proactively empower good conservation work that will position the state for a favorable outcome in future ESA listing reviews and decisions.

I write to request the Oregon Legislature to support Governor Brown's request of \$500,000 for SageCon and aid in building Oregon's conservation and economic development legacy.

Respectfully submitted by,

Kathleen Brennan-Hunter
Director of Conservation Programs