



HARNEY COUNTY COURT

Office of Harney County Judge Pete Runnels
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April 1, 2019

Re: Support for HB 3132

Chair Witt and members of the Committee,

Harney County faces a number of economic and environmental challenges. As one of the state's most geographically diverse and sparsely populated counties, we desperately seek investment and innovation in our county, particularly when it affects agriculture and our water quantity challenges. HB 3132 is a conduit to additional conservation efforts as well as potentially beneficial to our farms and ranches. I urge your support.

Last June, several legislators came to Frontier Oregon to see first-hand the riparian restoration at Silvie's Valley Ranch. I was among the community leaders and businesses from Grant and Harney Counties to talk about unique challenges in Frontier Oregon and potential approaches.

A few of the significant challenges we face: more than 70 percent of grade school students in some Frontier Oregon cities eligible for free breakfast in schools; high unemployment rates given the growing challenges and costs in agriculture and complete decimation of the forest products industry; "brain drain" or lack of jobs for young people to return to after education; an aging work force; and, a desperate need for upgraded infrastructure water, power, broadband, transportation. Finally, inconsistent management of forests, streams, and natural resources have taken a substantial toll on our landscape and wages in our community. This affects not only the morale of our Frontier Oregon citizens, but the tax rolls our county, towns, and schools depend on.

Fortunately, our unique and beloved region of the state also has opportunities: Big, beautiful big vistas; abundance of wildlife; major thoroughfares in Highways 20, and 395 as well as several good local airports; the legacies of our existing cattle and hay ranches that are still squeaking by economically; small businesses catering to local communities and learning how to accommodate and deal with high end destination tourism. Fortunately, the legislature has acknowledged that Frontier Oregon is different from urban or rural parts of the state - passed a law enabling the Silvie's Valley Ranch pilot project in 2011 (HB 3465) and the new guest ranch law in 2018 (HB 4031).

HB 3132 is another bill tailored to our unique geography and focused on ecological and economic benefits. This bill recognizes two things: the changing hydrology of the upper basins that feed into Malheur Lake, and the benefits of streamlining the regulatory process to get our farmers and ranchers to address erosion and riparian degradation. I've seen first-hand the ecological benefits AND economic benefits of restoring ancient floodplains and putting these meadows back to productive use for fish, birds, elk, deer AND ranchers. Potentially of even greater importance, this work results in creation of fire breaks in watersheds, a critical issue for all Oregonians.

On behalf of Harney County, I urge your support of HB 3132. This bill strikes a good balance to reduce government processes in order to encourage environmental restoration and good ranching practices. It is limited to closed basins in Eastern Oregon, such as those in Harney County, and allows for continued understanding of innovative practices. All of which can benefit our county through economic development, ecotourism, and increased productivity. Please vote "yes" on HB 3132.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pete Runnels", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Pete Runnels, County Judge