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Letter in support of the Institute for Natural Resources

Submitted to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education

April 17, 2019

Co-chairs Frederick and McLain,

I write to you in support of the Institute for Natural Resources (INR). It is important for our work that INR, and its staff and products continue to be supported by the State of Oregon

I am the Director of Conservation Programs with The Nature Conservancy in Oregon (TNC). Founded in 1951, TNC is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. INR is an invaluable partner in our statewide efforts, providing scientific support, cutting edge analytics and data sharing platforms to inform conservation actions.

INR products have been used extensively by TNC for many years, including the *Protected Areas Database*, *Biotics Biodiversity Database*, and *General Land Office-based Historical Vegetation Maps*. Most recently, INR's foundational products are assisting state agencies and partner organizations to realize the outcomes described in the *Oregon Sage-Grouse Action Plan*, officially adopted by the state in 2015 through Executive Order 15-18. Outstanding examples of INR's work on this project include:

- **Vegetation map for the range of greater sage-grouse in Oregon** - Vegetation composition and condition are critical limiting factors in the distribution and health of sage-grouse populations. INR's remote-sensing and predictive modelling capabilities were used to derive highly accurate maps of vegetation from satellite data and field-based vegetation measurements. These data are also a partial basis for restoration efforts, identifying areas where invasive and encroaching plant species are degrading important sage-grouse habitats. Regular updates to these data will also provide information on vegetation trends over time, helping to quantify the effectiveness of activities designed to improve habitat quality.
- **Sage-grouse Decision Support Tools** – These interactive tools, built within the Oregon Explorer interface, provide relevant information to developers and conservation practitioners across Oregon's greater sage-grouse range. Developers can receive estimates of relative mitigation costs based upon project type, size and location (<https://oregonexplorer.info/content/sage-grouse-development-siting-tool>), as well as information on measures to reduce habitat impacts and

mitigations costs. Similarly, restoration and conservation planning activities are supported by the *Sage-Grouse Data Viewer* and upcoming *Conservation Planning Tool* (https://tools.oregonexplorer.info/OE_HTMLViewer/index.html?viewer=sagegrouse).

While Federal agencies are also producing sage-grouse planning tools, their multi-state focus cannot always meet the needs of local planners. Regional data are often coarser than state-specific information and results from broad regional analyses may have little relevance at the state scale. Successful management of sage-grouse within Oregon absolutely requires tools that are built with best available data on local threats and habitat conditions. INR is the entity in Oregon which can best meet those needs.

These sage-grouse related products and tools are just a few recent examples of how TNC and our state and federal partners rely upon INR. Others recent examples are related to wildfire risk, forest management, water conservation, and many other natural resource issues of critical importance to all Oregonians. TNC hopes to partner with and depend upon the products produced by INR for many years to come.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kenna Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "K".