



**Letter from
Mid-Willamette valley
Council of Governments
Chair on Wildlife Habitat
Conservation and
Management Program**

6/1/2021

Chair Marsh,

I hope that this note finds you well and that you are meeting with your success in your important work for Oregon and its people.

My name is Sal Peralta. I am Chair of the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments, which addresses issues of regional concern and provides planning, grant administration, transportation and economic development services for 44 cities, counties and special districts in Marion, Polk and Yamhill Counties and the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde.

I am writing to express my thanks to you and your committee for hearing updates to the Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program.

I believe that fully funding this program, which has willing landowners and numerous partners in local governments across the state, is the single most important thing the legislature can do to preserve and restore habitat, particularly the Willamette Valley's few remaining oak savannas.

For decades, the State has incentivized the elimination of oak savannas through tax policies that provide deferrals for agricultural and commercial timber uses. This has resulted in more than a 98 percent loss of Oak savannas in the Willamette Valley as they have been repurposed for commercial and agricultural uses.

The Habitat Conservation and Management Program can help to restore oak savannas and other habitat by providing a similar tax incentive for property owners who would like to restore their properties and hold them for conservation use.

My understanding is that the program is no longer taking applications due to lack of capacity to develop site plans.

My recommendation is that you encourage a greater role for Soil and Water Conservation districts in site planning and implementation verification and increase funding to the state agency for the review and approval of locally-developed conservation plans.

This is a critical program for our region and for our state.

Sincerely,

Sal Peralta
Chair, Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments

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