



Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District

Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue
900 Court Street NE
Hearing Room A
Salem, OR 97301

Submitted to: <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Committees/SFR/Overview>

RE: House Bill 2527 - Relating to wildlife habitat special assessment

Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District (CSWCD) supports HB 2527 that would resolve administrative challenges with the Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program (WHCMP), making it available to landowners again in Clackamas County.

CSWCD works with landowners to protect and restore important habitats throughout Clackamas County. We, along with other regional partners and Soil and Water Conservation Districts in Oregon, are focused on restoring and protecting Oregon white oak habitat.

Over time we've found that many landowners, who would otherwise be willing to facilitate oak habitat on their land, have declined to follow through once they learn that doing so makes it difficult to retain their agricultural or forest tax deferral. Since many of the properties that are eligible for WHCMP are already in an agricultural or forestry related tax deferred status, there should not be significant tax revenue impacts for properties that transition to a WHCMP deferral.

The Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program (WHCMP) addresses this issue by providing a tax deferral on land maintained for wildlife habitat. However, due to the administrative burden required by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for monitoring and compliance enforcement, they lack the staffing to administer the WHCMP in its current form, making it unavailable to landowners in ODFW's North Willamette Watershed District since 2017.

House Bill 2527 amending certain provisions of the WHCMP, is the result of five years of collaboration between a coalition of 8 Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, regional conservation groups like Willamette Partnership and Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture, and ODFW.

This bill changes ODFW's monitoring responsibilities for the program from mandatory on all enrollments to discretionary, and requires landowners to provide attestations of compliance, similar to how other deferral programs are administered. With this approach, ODFW has indicated that it will be able to focus its existing capacity on new enrollments, but retains the ability to monitor enrolled lands when there is a need to do so. The proposed legislation also enables ODFW to focus enrollment on priority habitats such as Oregon white oak as identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

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Making WHCMP available to Clackamas County landowners and managers is critical to the future success of our priority oak habitat work on private lands.

If ODFW's administrative roadblocks for WHCMP can be solved with the changes proposed in HB 2527, landowners won't have to choose between managing for habitat and losing their deferral, helping prevent loss of remaining Oregon white oak and other critical habitats identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christopher Lapp', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Christopher Lapp
District Manager