

HB 2527 ODFW Wildlife Tax Deferral Program – registered Oregon voter in Support

Fran Warren 23 January 2023

As a volunteer member of the Regional Corridors and Connectivity Strategic Action Planning team, I have been working with over 100 agencies across our region and I have learned a great deal about the barriers and opportunities for Habitat Conservation. I have also learned a great deal about the significant loss of habitat and I am happy to share any of these facts with legislators should you be interested.

In Washington County, Oregon, we have the very top level soil quality and many forested areas in private ownership. This area, like much of our state, is under tremendous challenges for economic development as well as competition for physical space. Oregon Statewide Land Use Goals 1, 3, 4, 5 and 10 are all in competition for these precious resources. It is essential that the state have rules in place to encourage both the safeguarding of our natural resources as well as private industry expansion. At this time, there are not enough incentives for private landowners to maintain habitat “for the public good” and they are succumbing to private industry which eventually results in 85% of those natural resources succumbing to impervious surfaces. The net result is loss of climate defense and ecological diversity.

Prioritizing projects based on Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats would increase impact for the capacity expended and simplifying the administration of the program also enables more private landowner enrollments to occur. These changes bring habitat deferrals in line with the requirements for farm and agricultural deferral programs. SWCDs, partners, and other qualified entities can provide the technical advice needed to help enrolled and prospective enrollees be successful.

There is demand for these programs from landowners, and there are positive social, economic, and ecologic outcomes that can be gained from WHCMP. If we can work with ODFW to solve the administrative hurdles to delivering the program, there are lands across the state that are ready to enroll to achieve the goals of the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

OPPORTUNITY: In the Cooper Mountain area of Washington County, our Regional Nature Park depends on the vegetated corridors that enable wildlife to pass through, on the important habitats and natural resources that extend beyond the park boundaries, and on the uninterrupted treeshed across the Tualatin Valley. As development proceeds in surrounding areas, the attributes that make the park special—and resilient—are at risk of being damaged or lost. There is still time to protect and restore crucial habitat on the south and west sides of the park, including oak woods, prairie, mature mixed forest, ponds, and riparian areas, even as we add badly-needed housing in a fast-growing part of the metropolitan region.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are also serious concerns. The expanded UGB includes nearly 4 miles of perennial and seasonal streams, perhaps 200 acres of mixed habitats including a crucial 135 acres where the tributaries of McKernan Creek converge, and where the largest remaining unprotected oak and prairie stands reside, and two major connectivity corridors to the Tualatin River. On these steep, south-facing slopes, preserving statutory-minimum riparian buffers will not be adequate to protect streams from erosion and canopy loss, nor will they remain passable to wildlife, especially if multiple road crossings are built. Even the increased light pollution, noise, and human activity that will come with urban development will be deterrents to wildlife use. There is potential to help mitigate some of the unavoidable impacts by working with downstream rural landowners to protect and enhance the McKernan Creek riparian corridor to the Tualatin River.

We should take this opportunity instead to model an approach to development that respects and nourishes local ecosystems and treats them as essential to healthy, sustainable, just, and affordable living. This opportunity requires incentives for these existing residents and property owners to support these environmental programs rather than succumbing to the fiscal benefits of short-term visioning.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony,

Fran Warren