



January 24, 2023

Dear Chair Helm, Vice Chair Hartman and Owens, members of the House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water Committee:

The Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Plan (WHCMP) is a cooperative effort between the state and local governments as well as private landowners to voluntarily conserve native wildlife habitat. The state created the program in 1993 to offer a property tax incentive to private landowners who want to provide habitat on their properties instead of, or in addition to, farming, growing timber, or other land uses. The program was changed in 2013 to allow counties the ability to opt in (or out) of the program.

Under the WHCMP, land that is subject to an approved wildlife habitat plan receives a special assessment, where property taxes are assessed at the relatively low value that would apply if the land were being farmed or used for commercial forestry purposes.

Currently, the 15 counties that participate in this program are: Columbia, Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Yamhill, Marion, Polk, Benton, Lane, Douglas, Deschutes, Lake, Sherman, Morrow, and Wheeler.

HB 2527 states the land that is subject to the conservation plan may be inspected by ODFW or a delegate of the agency. Having sought clarity with the Department on who the “delegate” is, ODFW will work through rule making to identify individuals that would fall under this title. It is our understanding the agency will lean on individuals such as Soil and Water Conservation Districts, OSU Agriculture Extension Officers, or other similarly qualified individuals. HB 2527 further states, in Section 5, that if the land is no longer being used for conservation purposes, the landowner must notify the county of that change. If it is discovered by the Department, or the Department’s delegate, that the land is not being used for the intended purpose, the Dewill notify the County Assessor directly upon this discovery. The County Assessor shall disqualify the landowner from the program and begin assessing the lot at the nonreduced tax assessment rate.

The Association of Oregon Counties supports land management that encourages active and adaptive management and protection of watersheds, habitat, forests, and rangelands to sustain a healthy and productive ecosystem over the long-term. It is for this reason and the changes in the bill outlined above that AOC is in support of HB 2527.

Thank you.

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