



February 8, 2023

Senate Committee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Testimony in Opposition to SB 70

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Girod, and Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Chapter Sierra Club, representing roughly 74,000 members and supporters, opposes SB70 as outlined in the points below, and urges the Committee to vote NO on this bill.

1. **Land Stewardship.** Oregon's land use regulations serve to protect our open spaces, conservation areas, agricultural lands, and other categories. Preserving and maintaining agricultural lands became Goal 3 of the Statewide Planning Goals under Gov. Tom McCall's innovative land use program of 1973, serving Oregon well for fifty years.
2. **Bad Precedent.** SB16 punctured that protection in 2021, and now SB70 would further erode agricultural lands protection with this dangerous precedent. It would amend the statutory reference for the definition of "high-value farmland" for residential rezoning of lands, in this instance within the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region. SB70 would allow the rezoning and partition of lands zoned for exclusive farm use. We object: Oregon must not allow a whittling away of high-value farmland, the state's limited and most productive agricultural land.

SB70 seeks to "increase rural residential housing options in the Border Region in response to significant residential growth in Idaho," which we believe is false justification to further weaken Oregon's uniquely crafted high-value farmland use laws.

The proposed residential area of 200 acres is now also home to wildlife, songbirds, native vegetation, and open skies. These represent valued natural treasures that we should not recklessly displace and lose forever.

3. **Water Use.** The proliferation here of new residential wells that would withdraw irreplaceable water from an ancient aquifer is unacceptable. Wells are going dry in a number of Oregon water-constrained counties, and residential sewer systems are degrading groundwater. We must not create a similar tragic loss of water quality and access in Malheur County (or other districts).

Unlike SB16, SB70 would open up residential development within irrigation districts, fragmenting and tying up some of our most productive and high-value farmland. For example, this acreage can support cattle grazing and other important agricultural commodities to feed Oregon's growing population.

4. **Housing Sprawl.** Residential development within existing and expanding urban growth boundaries makes more economic/fiscal sense than allowing housing sprawl a fair distance from existing cities and towns, where infrastructure access already exists: roads and road maintenance, sheriff, fire fighting and paramedic services, internet and energy connections, schools, repair, grocery and commercial businesses.

Duplicating even basic infrastructure services would be wasteful of resources, inefficient, burdensome, and costly—not amenable to affordable housing or the imperative of mindful use of resources. Further, new housing development within UGBs will spur civic engagement by new homeowners, enriching community life.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony to the Oregon Senate Committee on Natural Resources.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Dix
Chair Legislative Committee
Oregon Sierra Club