

Deschutes Land Trust

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CONSERVATION. COMMUNITY. CARING FOR THE LAND.

March 14, 2023

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
From: Deschutes Land Trust
RE: **Support for HB 3666.**

Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Hartman and Owens, Members of the Committee,

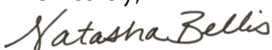
On behalf of the Deschutes Land Trust (Land Trust), I am writing to express my strong support for HB 3366, a bill that would fully fund the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program (OAHP), a grant making program under the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board. The importance of this bipartisan bill to the protection of Oregon's working landscapes as vital habitat for our fish and wildlife resources and as cornerstones of the state's rural economies cannot be overstated.

As a land trust working to conserve and care for the lands and waters that sustain Central Oregon so that local communities and the natural world can flourish together for generations to come, protecting intact farms, ranches and forestlands is one of our core areas of focus. To date we have worked with willing landowners to protect over 7,000 acres of working lands from fragmentation, enhancing fish and wildlife habitat and strengthening rural agricultural economies.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture, Oregon lost 400,000 acres of farmland to growth and development between 2007 and 2017. This conversion is very apparent in our service area—some of the fastest growing counties and urban areas in the state. As growth pressure mounts and counties increase approval of conditional use permits and non-farm dwellings, landowners are increasingly looking to conservation as an option to maintain the lands they've worked so hard steward. With the average age of an Oregon farmer over 60 years, OAHP provides grant programs to help retiring farmers liquidate some of the value of their land and transition their operations to younger generations. The Land Trust has several working lands projects in development but lack of state match for federal funding severely limits our progress. The funding provided in HB 3366 will help the Land Trust increase the pace and scale of our conservation efforts by providing vital state match to federal agricultural easement funding programs.

From succession planning to conservation planning to working lands easements, OAHP is custom designed for protecting agricultural lands and all the natural resources they help maintain. This program is a tremendous asset to our state and the Land Trust encourages the Committee to approve HB 3366. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,



Natasha Bellis

Conservation Director