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March 30, 2023

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE Salem Oregon 97301

Re: HB 3181 – Support

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Hartman, Vice-Chair Owens and members of the committee,

Verde's mission is to build environmental wealth through organizing, advocacy, and social enterprise. Environmental wealth can mean many things including the benefits that flow to communities from both renewable energy projects and thriving agricultural lands. To balance those ends, I am here today in support of HB 3181. I will also preview the forthcoming -1 amendments.

Oregon has set ambitious energy targets. There are still many projects and many acres of land that will be needed to get there. At the same time wildlife habitat, agricultural land, and historical, cultural, and archeological resources face a variety of pressures. If we are to meet our energy goals while also not communicating to communities that we will do so by any means – whether they agree with those goals or not – then it is necessary to ask what we can do better in energy siting and how we can work together across many interests, perspectives, and levels of experience to deploy the right strategies.

This is why Verde, Renewable NW, 1000 Friends of Oregon, The Nature Conservancy, and others helped to convene and facilitate a months-long process to include as many voices as possible with interest in and ideas about how our renewable energy and transmission siting system could be improved. The product of many hours of collaborative work and input from many different voices is the HB 3181-1 amendment. The language, which I believe is not posted but on the record in an earlier draft form, is a good faith attempt to capture next steps to move renewable energy siting forward while also balancing other land uses. HB 3181-1 is not in conflict with nor in place of any other bill. We need a variety of strategies, on a variety of timelines to accomplish a big body of work. HB 3181-1 is an attempt to give space to the longer term conversations that can't be accomplished now and may require some additional structure and resources to be successful.

The base bill of HB 3181 is a study to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with renewable energy and transmission siting. It is an attempt to formalize the ad hoc conversations that Verde and others helped to facilitate. The -1 amendments do just that and provide more detail and clarity about what this will look like. Just as in the original bill, the process will be convened by ODOE and DLCD and include a broad representation of interests from state agencies, tribal governments, counties and other public bodies, as well as the developers who make projects happen, the utilities who purchase that power, impacted agricultural landowners, and energy, conservation, and community advocates.

Together, these entities will take on a number of different tasks in order to identify the scale and characteristics of locations where renewable energy can be appropriately encouraged. It also addresses the need for new transmission and figuring out how to add the capacity that is badly needed to develop renewable energy projects, while also minimizing the footprint and impact of transmission development. Finally, the advisory body will identify regulatory changes and resource needs to expedite siting and build community capacity around this work.

Concurrent to this process, and as an alternative to the top down approaches we typically see, counties will identify lower conflict renewable energy siting overlays consistent with state land use goals in consultation with their communities and landowners to expedite renewable energy siting. This approach is an attempt to instill more flexibility and local determination for how best to balance land use needs. This is also not an unfunded mandate.

To that end, counties will be allocated money to support siting activities, staffing needs, or other capacity building factors. A common theme in the collaborative siting work was how thinly stretched county planning departments are. Finally, the HB 3181-1 amendments also allocate resources to ODOE to support public bodies, tribal governments, and community organizations in participating in the advisory work in the bill, or Energy Facilities Siting Council processes. These kinds of investments will better support and acknowledge the enormous amount of time many community members and tribal government staff put into complex processes.

Renewable energy siting is not easy work, nor is making policy to this end. No process is perfect, but I'm glad we tried and I hope that work continues. I want to thank the other testifiers and all process participants for their leadership, faith, and good humor. I urge you to support HB 3181.

Respectfully,

Oriana Magnera
Energy Climate and Transportation Manager, Verde