

April 18, 2023

To: House Committee on Revenue

From: Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District

Re: Support HB 2527- Wildlife Habitat Conservation and Management Program

Chair Nathanson and Committee Members,

Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District (Tualatin SWCD) strongly supports House Bill 2527 and ODFW's Wildlife Tax Deferral Program. Tualatin SWCD has been a part of a coalition of 8 Oregon SWCDs, ODFW, and regional partners over the past five years that have been working to make the program available again.

Managing for habitat on land in agriculture or forestry deferral puts landowners at risk of losing those deferrals and being assessed back taxes. Once they realize this, many landowners with ag or forest deferrals decline to manage for habitat. They can't afford or justify the loss of their existing tax deferral.

WHCMP, which can solve the issue with loss of deferrals for transitioning to managing for habitat, has been unavailable to new enrollees in ODFW's North Willamette Watershed District for the past five years.

WHCMP is important to preserving and restoring Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats. Significant portions of remaining critical habitats reside on private lands. Much of the remaining habitat is at threat of loss to conversion or development. Because of these threats, Tualatin SWCD, other SWCDs, Regional partnerships, state, and federal agencies are actively prioritizing protection of Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats and are investing time and resources for restoration, but we are running into a significant financial barrier for many landowners who are willing to restore or protect habitat but may lose existing tax deferrals.

We believe that WHCMP is the right tool that can solve the deferral issue and offset the cost of maintenance.

Tualatin SWCD believes House Bill 2527 will resolve the capacity problems that have plagued the program. Monitoring is time intensive, and giving ODFW discretion on when to monitor a property will free up time for new enrollments. 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 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, and in Washington County, that are ready to enroll to achieve the goals of the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lacey M. Townsend". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lacey Townsend, Executive Director