

Subject: Support for \$5M Renewal of the Natural and Working Lands Fund in OWEB's Budget

02/28/2025

Dear Co-Chairs Frederick and Levy and members of the Joint Subcommittee On Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee:

I am writing as a consultant in the food service industry "*Food with Thought*" to express strong support for the inclusion of \$5 million in OWEB's budget for the renewal of the Natural and Working Lands Fund (NWL Fund). As an organization committed to sustainable food systems and regenerative agricultural practices, we recognize the vital role that Oregon's working lands play in mitigating climate change, preserving biodiversity, and ensuring the long-term resilience of our communities.

The Importance of Natural Climate Solutions

Natural climate solutions focus on three key objectives:

- Removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it in Oregon's soils, wetlands, and forests.
- Increasing ecosystem resilience, reducing the risks of wildfire, drought, and soil degradation.
- Enhancing human well-being by improving air and water quality, soil fertility, and local food security.

Co-Benefits of Sustainable Land Stewardship

Investing in natural and working lands delivers far-reaching benefits beyond carbon sequestration:

- **Wildfire Risk Management:** Healthy forests, wetlands, and grasslands reduce the frequency and intensity of wildfires.
- **Water Security:** Improved land management practices enhance water filtration and retention, ensuring reliable water supplies.
- **Biodiversity & Pollinator Habitat:** By protecting and restoring natural ecosystems, we support species vital to agriculture and ecosystem health.
- **Soil Health & Flood Prevention:** Building organic matter in the soil reduces erosion, absorbs excess rainfall, and mitigates flood damage.

Why Sustained Investment is Critical

The NWL Fund is a crucial mechanism providing landowners, Tribes, and environmental justice communities with financial and technical assistance to implement regenerative practices. In just one year, the fund has successfully leveraged \$9 million in federal investments, with the potential for even greater returns if sustained.

With climate challenges intensifying, delaying investment will only increase costs down the road. Programs like these take time to establish, and their benefits compound over time. Continued funding will ensure the transition from pilot projects to established, scalable efforts that yield lasting economic and environmental returns.

Oregon has long been a leader in environmental stewardship, and this \$5 million investment represents an opportunity to build upon that legacy. I urge you to prioritize the Natural and Working Lands Fund in the 2025-2027 biennium budget. This investment is not just an environmental imperative but a strategic economic decision that will support Oregon's agricultural and forestry sectors while safeguarding our communities from climate-related disruptions.

Thank you for your time and for your leadership in shaping a more resilient and sustainable Oregon.

Sincerely,

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Transforming Vision into Food Solutions

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