



www.RogueClimate.org || PO Box 1980, Phoenix, OR 97535 || 541-301-9204

Coos Bay Office: 153 N. Broadway Coos Bay, OR 97420 || 541- 816-0758

Re: Rogue Climate Testimony regarding HB 3580

Dear Co-Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of HB 3580: Relating to eelgrass resources in state waters; declaring an emergency.

Rogue Climate serves and works alongside Southern Oregon and South Coast communities most impacted by climate change, including low-income, rural, youth, and communities of color, by organizing for clean energy, sustainable jobs, and a healthy environment. We do so through leadership development, political education, and campaigns for policies that benefit our communities.

Eelgrass is an essential habitat for many fish species, providing vital nursery grounds for juvenile fish and shellfish species and, in return, supporting a thriving fishery industry that generates over \$178 million per year. It also plays a significant role in climate resilience, sequestering carbon at a rate 35 times faster than rainforests, helping to mitigate storm surges, and buffering the increasing impacts of ocean acidification. Yet, despite its importance, eelgrass is increasingly threatened and disappearing from our coastal areas. Pollution, development, warming waters, and invasive species are all contributing to the [loss of eelgrass](#). Without a coordinated, statewide strategy to protect and restore eelgrass, we risk losing this invaluable resource.

Current management plans for eelgrass in Oregon are either outdated or nonexistent. Oregon has lost 24% of its estuary habitat since 1870, and in Coos Bay, we've already seen up to a 90% loss of eelgrass meadows. Statewide, eelgrass has been traditionally overlooked or not a priority in earlier cross-agency coastal management strategies. Estuary management plans are decades old, and the monitoring of eelgrass is infrequent, with resources currently stretched thin—only one estuary is mapped every 10 years. There is no coordinated effort to protect or restore eelgrass meadows like there is for other vital habitats like kelp forests. The full extent of eelgrass loss remains unknown due to limited data, making conservation efforts more challenging.

Eelgrass is important to Oregon's South Coast communities because it can serve as a [climate resilience tool](#) for natural carbon sequestration, especially as wildfire seasons increase the number of hot, smokey days on the coast. Eelgrass also helps support juvenile stock growth for commercial and recreational fish and shellfish industries, which are considered critical economic drivers for Oregon's coastal communities. For coastal tribes, eelgrass is an important cultural resource that needs to be able to thrive for generations to come. At Rogue Climate's South Coast office in Coos Bay, field staff often hear from community members that eelgrass has



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superpowers that people don't realize make coastal communities thrive in the face of changing ocean and climate conditions.

HB 3580 provides an opportunity to ensure that we can safeguard eelgrass for future generations, improving our resilience to climate change and supporting local fisheries. Coordinated action and targeted policies are essential to protect this vital habitat, and it's time to take the steps necessary to secure eelgrass meadows before it's too late. Please prioritize this essential coastal habitat by voting in support of HB 3580.

Sincerely,

Jess Grady-Benson, Organizing Director

Zoe Serrano, Legislative Coordinator

Ashley Audycki, South Coast Coordinator