

Dear Co-chair Helm, Co-chair Owens and members of the committee,

My name is Angela Whitlock and I am the Marine Program Manager with North Coast Land Conservancy. I am a native Oregonian and have been living on the north coast for the past 25 years.

I am writing to ask that you please support HB 3580 and our invaluable eelgrass meadows. This bill offers a great opportunity to support biodiversity, coastal economies, and increase resilience to a changing climate.

Oregon's underwater eelgrass meadows are biodiversity hotspots, carbon sinks, and nursery habitat to many juvenile fish species. Their health is vital for sustaining our fisheries, maintaining water quality, and buffering against climate impacts. However, there are signs these essential habitats are in decline in Oregon. HB 3580 would set up a Taskforce to set conservation targets through a collaborative effort involving agencies, Tribes, scientists, local communities, and others. This bill is the first essential step to proactively prevent habitat loss before it's too late.

Now is the time to act to protect our coastal ecosystems. For a modest investment we can ensure that eelgrass meadows can be conserved to protect the health of people and wildlife for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Angela Whitlock