

House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment

Testimony on HB 4031 - Support

Submitted by Lauren Link, State Policy Advisor

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Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Gamba and Levy, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 4031, a bill that provides a temporary county permitting pathway for “shovel ready” large scale renewable energy projects to responsibly leverage expiring federal tax credits.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a non-partisan, science-based organization that works in communities across the state, manages lands and waters in varied ecosystems, and partners with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber, and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature. As a conservation organization, TNC is committed to fighting both climate change and biodiversity loss to create a future where people and nature thrive.

We recognize the challenge that comes with balancing our need to protect and conserve our most sensitive ecosystems and productive working lands, while at the same time, needing to be responsive to our region’s growing energy needs and provide clean, reliable, and affordable energy to Oregonians.

We believe HB 4031 strikes this “right balance” by allowing a temporary alternative pathway for counties to site renewable energy projects in a timely process that captures federal tax credits, while upholding the environmental considerations and public engagement standard outlined in the county siting process passed in 2019 (HB 2329). Through this process, counties are required to evaluate significant fish and wildlife habitat impacts and develop a mitigation plan in consultation with the Oregon State Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development.

TNC is supportive of providing counties with this temporary permitting pathway and see great value in having counties lead permitting processes for renewable energy projects, as they are often well positioned on-the-ground, in those communities, to understand their needs and the impacts associated with new renewable energy development. Understanding that this permitting process requires adequate staffing and resources at the counties, we are cognizant of potential capacity issues and appreciate that the bill allows counties to opt out and refer applications to the state Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) process.

We know that Oregon is facing unprecedented load growth on an already strained electrical system. The newly released [Oregon Energy Strategy](#) identifies five least cost pathways, with Clean Electricity being one, to meeting Oregon’s growing energy needs that maximizes benefits to Oregonians by reducing energy costs and increasing reliability and resiliency. We support the sunset provision in the legislation and urge all parties to work together to find sustainable, long-term solutions to the challenges that are hampering Oregon’s progress to reach its clean energy goals.