

Testimony on House Bill 2173
Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Natural Areas Program Director
House Committee on Land Use
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My name is Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, and I direct Metro's natural areas program. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and to explain why Metro opposes HB 2173.

Metro is the regional government of the Portland metropolitan area. The voters of the region, in approving the Metro Charter, declared Metro's most important service to be "planning and policy making to preserve and enhance the quality of life and the environment for ourselves and future generations." Both the Metro Charter and Oregon statutes give Metro authority over "issues of metropolitan concern," including urban issues that are regional in nature rather than local and challenges that cross city and county lines. Protection of natural areas, water quality and wildlife habitat is just such an issue.

In 1995 and again in 2006, Metro-area voters approved bond measures totaling \$362 million to acquire land in order to protect important natural areas from the impacts of growth, and specifically to protect and improve water quality and wildlife habitat. To date, Metro has acquired 12,000 acres – all from willing sellers at market value.

Restoring wetlands is an important element of our natural areas program. Wetlands store, clean, and filter water, prevent soil erosion, and control flooding. Once lost, these functions are difficult and expensive to replace. Strategic restoration of wetlands is widely recognized as a necessary and cost-effective approach to protecting water quality and recovering salmon.

We also know there is a strong connection between clean water and economic development. For example, many businesses in our region depend on clean water that comes out of the Tualatin River for high tech manufacturing, beer production and other products that play a vital role in the regional economy. Clean water in the Tualatin starts with healthy watersheds upstream, including healthy wetlands.

Metro currently manages approximately 3200 acres zoned EFU, including over 880 acres leased for agricultural use and nearly 1300 acres of forests (see notes below).

When agricultural land is purchased, the Metro Council has directed staff to strive to continue agricultural production on remaining farmland and to work with the agricultural community in the development of our acquisition plans – which we have done. Metro staff continues to work with the agricultural community in areas where we have property acquisition goals that may include some land zoned for agriculture or in agricultural production. We believe our efforts to accommodate the concerns of the farm community have demonstrated our good faith in working to ensure that our acquisitions do not undermine the agricultural economy in our region.

Despite these efforts, HB 2173 would create a significant barrier to our efforts to carry out the will of the voters. Requiring every wetland restoration project to undergo a land use process to seek conditional approval from the county would create an unnecessary, costly and time-consuming process that would slow the achievement of the environmental benefits our program is designed to achieve, while contributing nothing of value to the agricultural economy.

For these reasons, Metro strongly opposes requiring a conditional use permit for restoration of wetlands on EFU zoned lands. We urge you to oppose HB 2173. Thank you for your consideration.

Some facts about Metro's Natural Areas Program:

Since 1995, Metro has protected more than 13,000 acres of land, all from willing sellers at market value. Metro's ownership in EFU zoned lands total 3249 acres. Of those acres:

- 884 acres are currently leased for agriculture.
- 137 acres are developed (roads, buildings, etc...) actions already covered in conditional use permitting.
- 2257 acres are trees, shrubs, grass, sand bars or open water.
- 471 acres are wetlands.
- 1536 acres have hydric soils (potential wetlands).
- 1577 are in floodplains.