



February 3, 2016

Chair Chris Edwards  
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources  
Oregon State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE Room 347  
Salem, OR 97301

**RE: Opposition to SB 1517**

Dear Chair Edwards and Committee Members:

**The Wetlands Conservancy opposes SB 1517** as we feel it sends the wrong message about the value and role that wetlands play in Oregon and creates an additional layer of process that won't lead to better projects or community dialogue.

Wetlands are vital to the health of our environment in so many ways. Like kidneys, they absorb, filter and recirculate our water. In addition, they provide critical fish and wildlife habitat to so many of the iconic species we identify with Oregon. In the face of destructive floods, they serve as natural buffers helping to protect our communities. With the heightened awareness around limited water resources, their role in cleaning and recharging our water supply has become even more essential. While these beautiful spaces are found throughout Oregon, wetlands often go unrecognized as the most biologically rich and productive landscapes in our state. For 35 years, The Wetlands Conservancy has been working in partnership with communities all across Oregon to protect, conserve and restore Oregon's wetlands. Many of these partnerships have been with private landowners, ranchers, farmers, surface water management agencies, county governments in rural areas of Oregon. Through these projects we have found common vision on the roles that wetlands play in the landscape, ecological health, public health and safety, supporting agricultural and economic development. Through on the ground projects and lots of discussion we have been able to identify problem or conflict areas and look for solutions to avoid or mitigate the problems.

As written and the proposed amendments to SB 1517 will add additional review for projects take away the shield of liability for private landowners who choose to do enhancements or restoration projects. This will create more barriers and hoops and disincentives to groups and individuals who are working to provide public benefits through their voluntary efforts conserving and restoring Oregon wetlands. In our experience around the state, we found have found that discussions and trust building result in creative problem solving, new partnerships and seeing how individual projects added together improved the natural, human and economic environment. These conversations are best done at a local level rather than a statewide legislative mandate. The Wetlands Conservancy supports and would be very interested in

participating in a broad based conversation to better understand and address problems faced by rural counties.

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