



Together. For Oregon's Land.

February 23, 2016

Representative Brad Witt, Chair  
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources  
Oregon State Legislature

**Testimony on SB 1517-A  
Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts**

Blue Mountains Conservancy  
Blue Mountain Land Trust  
Columbia Land Trust  
Deschutes Land Trust  
Friends of the Columbia Gorge Land Trust  
Greenbelt Land Trust  
Klamath Lake Land Trust  
Lower Nehalem Community Trust  
McKenzie River Trust  
North Coast Land Conservancy  
Oregon Rangeland Trust  
Pacific Forest Trust  
Southern Oregon Land Conservancy  
The Conservation Fund  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Wetlands Conservancy  
The Trust for Public Land  
Wallowa Land Trust  
Wild Rivers Land Trust

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) serves and strengthens the land trust community in Oregon. COLT's 19 member land trusts work with voluntary private land owners to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, preserve open lands, maintain working farms and retain the values that make Oregon such an attractive place to live.

The 19 members of COLT are committed to the long-term health and sustainability of agriculture in Oregon and have a strong record of building collaborative relationships with working forest, farm and ranch landowners in Oregon. Land trusts work to help landowners achieve their needs, while also achieving important public objectives that ultimately reduce regulatory pressures on all landowners.

COLT supports the collaborative process outlined in SB 1517 and the intent of the bill to address landowner grievances that result from wetland restoration projects. **We are concerned, however, that the conditional use review included in the pilot program would discourage private land conservation in Tillamook County.**

**COLT can support SB 1517-A with the following change:**

**Remove Conditional Use Review for Wetlands**

The bill, as amended, will create a 10-year pilot project in Tillamook County that gives the county authority to approve or deny wetlands restoration under conditions outlined in [ORS 215.296](#) (1). Right now, wetlands restoration is an outright allowable use in EFU land. This new type of land use review requires the individual applicant to prove that a wetlands project 1) does not force significant change in accepted farm or forest practices on surrounding lands devoted to farm or forest use, or 2) will not increase the cost of farm or forest practices on surrounding land. This is a huge burden of proof for voluntary landowners and land trusts, and difficult impacts to define. The county review process is likely to cost applicants more money, demand more time, and open private land use decisions to a public process.



**Oregon's approach to conservation relies on voluntary tools**

Oregon's collaborative effort to restore sage grouse habitat and avoid ESA listing demonstrates the importance of voluntary tools to advance private land conservation. COLT would like to see a similar process in Tillamook County that encourages landowners, agencies, and conservation organizations to work together to address one of Oregon's natural resource goals- the recovery of Oregon Coast Coho.

**Need to better understand the problem**

COLT and our members support healthy productive agriculture AND the restoration of wetlands. The fact is - we need both, especially in the face of rising sea levels and other effects of climate change. Land trusts and our partners currently undergo a permit process with Department of State Lands when conducting large wetlands projects. That permit requires county review and neighbor notification. We would like to understand where the current permit process is breaking down and better understand the specific problems in Tillamook County that this bill seeks to address.

**Support for a task force or pilot project that allows for a collaborative planning process**

COLT supports a broad-based conversation to better understand landowner problems in Tillamook County. As specialists in voluntary, collaborative land conservation, we support a task force, or even a pilot project that opens a collaborative process, as outlined in section 4 (3) of the bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Kelley Beamer  
Executive Director, Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts

