



February 16, 2017

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources  
State Capitol  
900 Court Street NE  
Salem, OR 97301

### **Oregon Natural Desert Association testimony in opposition to HB 2365**

Chairman Clem and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2365. My name is Dan Morse. I am the Conservation Director for Oregon Natural Desert Association. Based in Bend, ONDA exists to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert on behalf of our more than 6,000 members and supporters from across Oregon and beyond.

As has been discussed already, HB 2365 would establish a task force to study the transfer of federal land in Oregon to state or private ownership. On behalf of those more than 6,000 members and supporters let me be very clear – we strongly oppose HB 2365 and the fundamentally flawed concepts it represents. ONDA is opposed to broad-scale transfer or disposal of American public lands, whether to states or other levels of government - or to private entities. The ultimate outcome of this bill would not be state land management of our public lands. The more likely outcome would be the future sale of our public lands when the state can't reasonably afford to manage them.

Like HB 2365, land transfer proposals in other states have been met with fierce opposition from a broad array of people of all political persuasions who use and care for American public lands. If HB 2365 receives continued consideration, I can assure you that ONDA's members and supporters from all across the state will stand staunchly opposed and will work tirelessly to stop this effort. And while we oppose the broad sale of our public lands we do acknowledge there can be site-specific, limited cases when the transfer or sale of small parcels of public land may be acceptable, so long as there is a transparent public process to ensure that such a decision is clearly in the public interest.

The 31.4 million acres of public land within Oregon provide immense value for our state. Not only do our public lands provide economic benefits, but they also provide ample space for outdoor recreation, which we all know is central to the Oregon way of life. From hiking and biking to hunting and fishing, Oregonians love to get outside and enjoy the incredible and diverse scenery that makes our state such a great place to live. And it is exactly because of these values that we don't need a costly taxpayer-funded task force to tell us what we already know: transferring American public lands to state or local governments would be a bad deal for Oregonians.

At a time when our state faces a \$1.8 billion budget shortfall and is considering the sale of public land in the Elliott State Forest, it would seem fiscally irresponsible to consider attempting to seize millions of acres of additional public land only to take on the massive financial liability that would come with it. The

sheer costs to the state for land management, fire suppression and other critical needs would be tremendous.

Studies in other states have concluded that transferring American public lands to the states would cost hundreds of millions of dollars, even after revenue from additional resource extraction is accounted for. For example, analysis of transferring public lands to state governments in Idaho and Montana, both of which contain about the same amount of public land as Oregon, found that the states would be on the hook for an additional \$111 million and \$367 million respectively in management costs. If American public lands were transferred to Oregon, firefighting costs on alone could cost Oregonians \$75 million a year. Clearly, the huge costs of fighting wildfires and managing our lands and waterways can only be shouldered by the federal government – which is fair, given these lands are owned by all Americans.

Additionally, Oregon enjoys enormous economic benefits derived from the American public lands within our state. BLM public lands in Oregon make up about half of our total public lands, supporting more than 9,900 jobs in Fiscal Year 2010. Many of those jobs were related to recreation, which resulted in an economic impact of more than \$650 million. The overall economic impact of BLM lands in Oregon that year was approximately \$1.3 billion.

Not only is our state government ill-equipped financially to manage some 31.4 million acres of additional public land, the complex responsibility of managing these lands is also best handled by the federal land management agencies. And while these agencies are not always perfect, our best role as citizens is to ensure these land managers are careful stewards of the multitude of uses on public lands. Oregonians would be best served if our state would press Congress to support the chronically underfunded agencies that manage our public lands and national forests. Adequate funding would ensure appropriate care for these places for the benefit of all.

I urge you to oppose HB 2365 and instead turn your energies toward working collaboratively with Oregon's congressional delegation and federal land management agencies to solve the most challenging issues on Oregon's public lands. Not only is such collaboration the best path to success, it is the Oregon way.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Morse". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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