**For Immediate Release**

**Sept 20, 2021**

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**Report: Land conservation crucial to combating climate change in Oregon**

*Advocates say storing carbon on working and natural lands is necessary for state to meet climate goals, and requires funding*

A new report from the Oregon Global Warming Commission (OGWC) details how Oregon can increase the amount of carbon stored on natural and working lands, and thus meet its climate change goals.

The OGWC report contains strong recommendations to ensure Oregon can meet its climate mitigation goals. We urge the legislature and the governor’s office to initiate funding to move the plan forward in the immediate future.

“The OGWC report has excellent recommendations for how Oregon can meets its climate goals by investing in carbon storage on natural and working lands. And those efforts require funding support from the legislature and the governor to implement the plan,” said Jan Lee, executive director of the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD).

Oregon failed to meet its 2020 carbon emissions goal and is not on track to meet any of its future goals. But if Oregon adequately implements the recommendations contained in the report, that trajectory can be changed.

With a presence in all of Oregon’s 36 counties, OACD helps farmers, ranchers and small woodland owners take actions that can store carbon. Examples on working lands include no-till farming, planting of cover crops, planting native rangeland grasses, and extending the time between timber harvests. Natural areas can also store carbon by conserving forests, marshes, grasslands and more.

The OGWC recommends vastly expanding working and natural lands conservation, with a focus on storing carbon. But to make it economically feasible, landowners need to be compensated. “Farmers are businesspeople. They can’t do this for free,” Lee said.

Earlier this year, it was expected that the state’s new carbon reduction program in the DEQ Climate Protection Plan would include a mechanism where owners of natural and working lands could access funding. The draft program rules were unveiled in August, but at the last minute it omitted carbon storage on natural and working lands.

“Oregonians are feeling the effects of climate change, and they want action. Oregon must invest in storing carbon on natural and working lands in order to meet its greenhouse gas reduction goals, which means we have to make it economically feasible. We have to provide incentives to expand voluntary conservation and carbon storage,” said Kelley Beamer, executive director for the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts.

“The Oregon Global Warming Commission has laid out excellent recommendations for how expanded conservation efforts on working and natural lands can help our state get on track to meet its carbon emissions goals. But we must find a way to fund it. The DEQ Climate Protection Plan would have provided that first opportunity,” Lee said.

Background

There are two main ways that, together, can help Oregon combat climate change:

* Lower emissions of greenhouse gases, largely from the transportation and energy sectors.
* Keep greenhouse gases stored in the land, particularly forests, grasslands, farms and ranches. The recently released report focused on ways Oregon can store more carbon on natural and working lands.

The recommendations in the report can help Oregon store carbon on the land – what’s known as carbon sequestration. Nationwide, research from the U.S. EPA shows that carbon sequestration on natural and working lands reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 12% in 2019, and there is an opportunity to double that figure, according to the report.

Oregon’s working lands and wild places play a key role in tempering the effects of the climate crisis. Land trusts are uniquely positioned to make an impact by protecting, restoring, and managing natural lands. Healthy land absorbs more carbon from the atmosphere and offers natural protection to our communities from threats like flooding and pollution in the face of climate change. Land trusts work to conserve natural and working lands so they can play a role in climate action.

About OACD

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) is a private, non-profit 501(c)(6) statewide membership organization that represents, supports and strengthens Oregon’s 45 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. We promote conservation and wise use of Oregon’s natural resources. We help drive adoption of statewide policies and programs that promote a quality environment and a productive economy. And we help inform the public of the value of conservation.

About COLT

The Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) serves and strengthens the land trust community in Oregon. At COLT, we build connections and advance policies that help protect our natural world—our water, wildlife and open space—for all people, forever.

This work helps our coalition members—30 conservation organizations around the state—do what they do best: protect wildlife and wild places, defend working farms and forests, provide recreation and parks, drive climate solutions and science, champion clean water for all and engage communities to protect our natural world.

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