

# Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD)

## Position Statements

Adopted - December, 2025

These position statements:

- Focus on natural resources matters,
- Relate to the business of Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs),
- Serve as a reference for OACD actions in legislative and regulatory matters, and
- Reflect a large majority of the opinions of Oregon SWCDs.

These position statements have been crafted with intent to remain at the policy level. Remaining at this level is important because flexibility is necessary to respond to foreseen and unforeseen regulatory and legislative initiatives. Also, the document must be kept to a modest length to preserve its usability. There is a deliberate attempt to avoid specific and detailed best management practices (e.g. prescribed burning, no-till farming, exclusion fencing, etc.). This is done because best practices are often situational based, and it is difficult to select one size fits all approaches to conservation.

### 1. GENERAL APPROACH TO NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION

#### **Balanced Approach to Natural Resources Management and Use**

*OACD supports a balance between conservation of natural resources and using natural resources responsibly.*

Discussion: In achieving the balance, key considerations include the need for economic vitality, food and forest products, water with ample supply and suitable quality, long-term sustainability of the natural resources, and an environment that is healthy, resilient, and diverse. OACD encourages management approaches that are respectful of the balance and believes that a full range of management tools need to be available to allow sound choices in a wide variety of situations.

#### **Voluntary Conservation**

*OACD supports the use of voluntary conservation as an approach to conserving natural resources.*

Discussion: Voluntary conservation that relies on the efforts of citizens and businesses can be effective in achieving results while at the same time supporting good relations with government agencies tasked with protecting our

natural resources. Voluntary conservation is not always an economical choice for landowners, so incentives will often be necessary to make it happen. Mandatory conservation through laws, regulations, and enforcement actions cannot be completely avoided, but is a less preferred approach.

### **Locally Led Conservation**

*OACD supports the use of locally led conservation as an approach to conserving natural resources.*

Discussion: Locally led conservation is beneficial because it helps make successful projects by incorporating knowledge of local conditions and developing community support. Local resources for projects are often insufficient and funding at the state and federal level is often needed to support locally led conservation efforts.

### **Sustainable Management Practices**

*OACD supports the use of sustainable resource management practices.*

Discussion: Sustainable management practices are those that can be continued for indefinite periods of time while allowing the natural resources such as plants, animals, soil, water, and air to remain in conditions that reflect a healthy environment.

### **Partnering and Coordinated Resource Planning**

*OACD supports partnerships and coordinated resource planning where multiple agencies and organizations can work together in a multidisciplinary approach for the benefit of the natural resources.*

Discussion: Often there are multiple organizations that have overlapping interests in individual projects and programs, and they each bring different knowledge, resources, and missions. Optimum projects and programs take advantages of the strengths that each organization can bring to a partnership.

### **Urban and Rural Conservation**

*OACD supports both urban and rural conservation efforts.*

Discussion: Impacts to our soil, water and other natural resources occur in both urban and rural settings, and it is important to support conservation in both settings.

## **Conservation on Public and Private Lands**

*OACD supports conservation on both public and private lands.*

Discussion: Impacts to our soil, water and other natural resources occur regardless of land ownership or control and it is important to support conservation on both private and public lands.

## **Conservation Education**

*OACD supports education and information programs that promote conservation of natural resources.*

Discussion: The effectiveness of conservation efforts is dependent on effective public education that is based on sound science and relevant practical experience. SWCDs and their partners should regularly conduct conservation tours, field days, forums and programs that expand the public understanding of conservation and share the stories of accomplishments.

## **Conservation Planning**

*OACD supports conservation planning to establish foundations for conservation practices and projects to move forward.*

Discussion: Implementation of conservation practices is dependent upon good planning to make sure that actions are effective and that they achieve a good balance in the use and preservation of our natural resources. Public agencies and private parties need to have sufficient resources to conduct planning efforts and to develop plans.

## **Locally Produced Food and Products**

*OACD supports locally grown food and other products derived from Oregon's natural resources.*

Discussion: Encouraging local food production and other products has many benefits including ensuring the viability of small farms, supporting local jobs and small businesses, strengthening local economies, and creating an important link between people and the land. Local food production has environmental benefits through minimizing the environmental footprint from long distance distribution systems. Support can be provided by promoting local markets, farm to school programs, voluntary certification programs, and education of consumers.

## **2. FUNDING**

### **Funding for SWCDs**

*OACD supports funding for SWCDs, particularly stable and consistent funding that promotes growth in capacity for SWCDs and funds projects.*

Discussion: SWCDs must have a reliable source of funding to accomplish their missions. Particularly important is funding that can be used without restriction for basic administration and overhead. Such funding is appropriately provided at the local and state levels. OACD supports voter-approved local taxes to provide additional funding to SWCDs. OACD supports grant opportunities for SWCDs, especially those that offer longer term funding and those that offer sufficient funds for technical services, administration, and overhead costs.

### **Funding for Natural Resource Agencies**

*OACD supports funding for federal and state natural resource agencies at levels that provide strong programs that support natural resources conservation and resiliency.*

Discussion: Natural resources conservation is dependent upon programs at the federal, state and local levels. OACD is particularly supportive of agency funding that can be used to supplement, enhance, and complement programs applicable to SWCDs.

### **Oregon Lottery Funds**

*OACD supports the continued use of lottery funds to fund natural resources conservation, especially for SWCD capacity grants and support of the Oregon Conservation Partnership.*

*OACD opposes actions that would reduce or restrict the availability of such funding.*

Discussion: Capacity grants are essential for SWCDs to be able to implement projects and must be preserved.

### **Long-Term Funding and Commitment for Conservation**

*OACD supports long-term funding and commitments for conservation.*

Discussion: Conservation efforts often take years to decades to implement, and it is important that funding and other support for projects and programs match the lifespan of the work. This long-term need is particularly true for monitoring and

project maintenance. It is important to recognize that monitoring is essential to development of scientific understanding, learning and adaptation. Additionally, state agencies that support conservation need to be adequately funded to implement and monitor their mandates.

### **3. WATER RESOURCES**

#### **Water Conservation**

*OACD supports water conservation.*

Discussion: Water conservation is the beneficial use of water without waste. Wasted water limits the potential for the full range of beneficial uses of the water.

#### **Groundwater Quality**

*OACD supports the use of best management practices to protect the quality of groundwater.*

Discussion: Once groundwater is contaminated it is exceedingly difficult and expensive to restore. Therefore, diligent efforts need to be made to minimize the amount of pollutants that are introduced into groundwater. Best management practices can be associated with design of waste management facilities, and appropriate application of fertilizers pesticides and insecticides to the land.

#### **Groundwater Supply**

*OACD supports efforts to better understand groundwater hydrogeology and make sure that Oregon's groundwater supply is used in a sustainable manner.*

Discussion: To effectively manage groundwater, we must have a thorough understanding of its location, quantity, quality, recharge characteristics, and movement between aquifers and to surface waters. With this understanding it is possible to determine how it can be used sustainably.

#### **Surface Water Quality**

*OACD supports efforts to better understand existing surface water quality and to work to achieve water quality standards in accordance with the federal Clean Water Act and Oregon laws.*

Discussion: The Clean Water Act (CWA) sets forth the directive to establish water quality criteria, list impaired water bodies (303d lists), and develop total maximum daily loads (TMDLs). In implementing the CWA there is substantial opportunity for judgment, e.g. in interpretation of science and water quality data. These interpretations have significant bearing on whether the resulting TMDLs

will support a balance between good water quality and the ability to economically use water resources for beneficial purposes.

Water quality monitoring to determine background concentrations of contaminants is essential to proper implementation of the CWA and state laws that govern water quality.

Funding for monitoring, development of scientifically sound TMDLs, and actions to achieve TMDLs is essential.

### **Surface Water Supply and Storage**

*OACD supports programs for water development that ensure adequate water supply at the time the water is needed and are protective of other natural resources and water rights of record.*

Discussion: Water can be a critical limiting factor in human activities and environmental health. New water supplies should be developed to the extent practical so long as they do not have serious negative consequences on other natural resources.

### **Water Planning**

*OACD supports comprehensive long range planning efforts to ensure that water resources are well managed given changing supplies, demands, and environmental conditions.*

Discussion: Oregon needs a strong vision of its water future and road maps for successfully moving forward. Planning is needed at the local watershed, regional, and state levels, and must be accomplished through active involvement of stakeholders, policy makers, and subject matter experts.

### **Water Measurement and Efficiency**

*OACD supports accountability for efficient water use.*

Discussion: Accountability means knowing how much water is used through measurement and control. Efficiency refers to minimizing water and energy waste.

### **Agricultural Water Quality Management Plans**

*OACD supports the role of Districts working with ODA to implement the Agricultural Water Quality Management Program and Agricultural Water Quality Management Area Plans as long as there is sufficient financial support to Districts to implement the plans at the local level.*

Discussion: The program and plans are effective approaches to preventing water pollution by providing technical support on the ground and providing a record of accountability to the public.

## **4. AGRICULTURE**

### **Agriculture in Oregon**

*OACD supports efforts to promote successful agriculture in Oregon.*

Discussion: Agriculture is a critical industry in Oregon that needs to continue in a manner that is economically viable and productive. It is important to have a diversity of crops, scales of operations, growing practices and right to farm protections.

## **5. FORESTRY**

### **Forestry in Oregon**

*OACD supports efforts to promote successful and sustainable forestry in Oregon.*

Discussion: Forestry is a critical industry in Oregon that needs to continue in a manner that is economically viable, productive and innovative. It is important to have a diversity of forest products, scales of operations, and management practices that support to sustainable forestry.

## **6. WILDFIRE**

### **Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation**

*OACD supports proactive efforts to prevent catastrophic wildfires and provide resiliency in natural resource environments and to mitigate damages caused by wildfire with a focus on recovery of natural resources.*

Discussion: It is understood that fire is a natural phenomenon and is an important part of ecosystem health, but excessive fuel loads can lead to high intensity fire that can lead to severe damage to soils, impacts on water quality, and loss of valuable timber and other resources. The trend towards more high intensity fires is increasing, and this trend should be reversed by appropriate management actions on both public and private land. Actions before wildfire happens should include efforts to reduce fuel loads with a focus on sustainability and creating resilient landscapes and communities. After a wildfire, key actions can include removal of hazards, reseeding and replanting, and stabilizing soils.

## **Fire Fighting**

*OACD supports increased funding and resources to fight fires and flexibility for the various agencies that fight fires to cooperate and share resources.*

Discussion: With the trend of more and larger fires, it is necessary to provide more resources to control fires, including the ability to coordinate suppression effectively among levels of local, state and federal government resources.

## **7. SOIL CONSERVATION AND HEALTH**

*OACD supports efforts to conserve soils and to build the health of soils.*

Discussion: Soil is a fundamental building block of our ecosystems. It forms in geologic time scales and is not easily replaced. Loss of soil is a substantial problem caused by wind and water erosion and poor management practices. Healthy soils exhibit physical, chemical and biological characteristics that allow people to achieve reasonable goals in an economical and sustainable manner. Improved soil health is linked to greater carbon sequestration, reduced surface runoff and erosion, and increased water holding capacity. Soil health is critical to agriculture, forestry, the natural environment, and people.

## **8. SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION**

### **Promotion of Science**

*OACD supports rigorous science-based research on current and emerging natural resource issues and needs.*

Discussion: Support for science and research programs is essential to advancing our understanding of natural resources and how to conserve and enhance them and improve resiliency.

### **Science Based Decision Making**

*OACD supports the use of scientific evidence in making public policy decisions, taking into account that decisions often involve some level of uncertainty and acceptance of reasonable risks.*

Discussion: It is recognized that science will continue to yield new information that will affect our understanding of natural resources. It is important to rely on the best current science, but action to conserve and use our natural resources cannot always wait for complete certainty in science.

## **Environmental Monitoring**

*OACD supports environmental monitoring to collect important information that can inform natural resource decisions.*

Discussion: The need for environmental monitoring has not received sufficient support in the past leading to frustration in not knowing which actions are necessary to conserve and protect natural resources and whether past projects and programs have been effective. Monitoring efforts with well-designed protocols and funding are necessary to support projects and programs. Efforts to build and manage comprehensive repositories for environmental data need to be supported so that data from various sources can be made accessible.

## **9. CLIMATE**

### **Climate Impacts**

*OACD supports efforts to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere and adapt to climate impacts with urgency. In doing so, actions on natural and working lands throughout the landscape should be promoted to achieve these ends.*

Discussion: While solutions to climate impacts will require a multifaced approach, OACD is most focused on those actions that take place on natural and working lands. Such actions include those that reduce emissions, sequester carbon increase the ability of natural resources to be resilient and adapt to changing climatic conditions. Important contributions can be made through management of natural lands in both urban and rural settings. Consideration must be given to implementing practices that complement key uses of the lands such as farming, forestry, and wildlife habitat.

OACD recognizes the key co-benefits of carbon sequestration in natural and working lands including but not limited to heathy soils, reduced need for external fertilizer and pesticide inputs, and water retention.

## **10, ENERGY**

### **Renewable Energy**

*OACD supports development of renewable and alternative energy sources.*

Discussion: Sustainable, low impact energy sources are needed to secure our future.

## **Renewable Energy Facilities Siting**

*OACD supports actions that result in locating renewable energy facilities, such as solar and wind facilities, at sites that do not substantially interfere with the function of important natural and working lands.*

Discussion: There are usually multiple options for siting renewable energy facilities, and the least expensive options are often on natural and working lands. OACD holds that natural and working lands are often valuable beyond their market value and need to be protected against loss as they are irreplaceable. Siting should be restricted on lands with productive soils and important natural resources considering regional characteristics of the land. Decisions on siting of renewable energy facilities on natural and working lands should be made consistently throughout the state taking into account soil and land use. Additionally, OACD supports regional self-sufficiency and distributed energy generation systems in agricultural operations.

## **11. LAND USE**

### **Right to Farm**

*OACD supports right-to-farm laws.*

Discussion: The ability to farm efficiently must be preserved and right-to-farm laws prevent interference from urban and other concerns. It is important to educate landowners regarding agriculture and forestry practices through workshops, publications, and community meetings.

### **Protection of High Value Farmland and Forestland**

*OACD supports protection of high value farmland and forestland.*

Discussion: High value farmland and forestland with high quality soils and good growing conditions continues to be lost due to urban encroachment and non-farm uses. Efforts should be made to minimize the loss of such lands. This includes preventing siting of large power generation facilities or other non-compliant structures or uses as defined under state zoning laws on high value farmland and forestland. OACD recognizes the need for affordable housing and holds that the focus of addressing affordable housing should not be directed towards high value farmland and forestland.

### **Support Oregon Land Use System**

*OACD supports Oregon's statewide land use system and opposes amendments or changes that lead to the conversion of resource lands outside of the 1973 Land Conservation and Development Act's established process.*

Discussion: The 1973 Land Conservation and Development Act established a statewide approach to managing growth, protecting farmland, and conserving natural resources. Oregon's land use system ensures our high-value resource lands remain intact, while creating a thoughtful pathway for growth through long-range planning. SWCDs are dependent on this land use system, as originally envisioned and drafted, to protect our world class soil, forests, natural areas and rivers.

### **Working Lands and Conservation Easements and Acquisitions**

*OACD supports efforts to implement resource conservation practices on working lands that conserve natural resources in harmony with the need to use the land.*

Discussion: Easements and acquisitions for both agriculture and forest lands can provide important opportunities for preserving natural resources from encroaching development and can provide the added benefit of carbon sequestration. The opportunities include use of good farming and forestry practices that conserve and protect soils and water. The use of conservation easements where there is high value in protecting the ecosystem and minimal loss of the ability to work the land are beneficial. SWCDs, private land trusts, and others can properly hold easements and own conservation properties because they can have the technical knowledge and financial assurances to ensure proper administration and monitoring of the easements or acquired land.

### **Wildlife Corridors**

*OACD supports actions that maintain and enhance important corridors for the movement of at-risk plants and animals.*

Discussion: Plants and animals need to be able to migrate to new locations for survival especially as the climate and land use change. The ability to migrate can be hampered by habitat fragmentation in various forms including incompatible land uses and barriers in the form of transportation infrastructure. It is important to identify at-risk species, their habitat needs, and their migration barriers and take actions to preserve and enhance key corridors.

### **Critical Habitats**

*OACD supports highly functioning ecosystems in critical habitats.*

Discussion: Riparian zones can support a wide diversity of plants and animals. They also have a very important role by buffering activities that can contribute to water pollution such as erosion of sediment and movement of nutrients. The

shade provided by trees in riparian zones is very important in keeping water temperatures cool.

Wetlands can provide critical habitats and serve important ecological functions. Wetlands continue to be lost to human development and need to be given high priority for protection and restoration. Fill and removal projects associated with urban land development and agricultural practices contribute to the loss of wetlands and need to be designed to minimize impacts and provide mitigation. Wetland mitigation banks provide opportunities for protection.

Coastal marshes and estuaries are of critical importance because they provide habitat for many plants and wildlife. They are of critical significance to west coast commercial fisheries. These areas are also a source of “blue carbon,” Provide a high ability to sequester carbon.

Uplands can also have critical habitat that needs to be protected. Sage grouse habitat is a good example.

It is important to inventory and define critical habitats to support good stewardship and policy.

### **Habitat and Agricultural Mitigation**

*OACD supports processes and programs for habitat and agricultural mitigation.*

Discussion: To support a balanced approach to natural resource management and use, flexibility is needed in how to mitigate impacts from loss of habitat and loss of agricultural lands. This can be done by offsite actions that equal or exceed the amount of the loss. One example of how to mitigate habitat loss is through mitigation banks. Another example is Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) can be used to manage larger land and water areas and secure protection and financial support.

## **12. WEED AND PEST MANAGEMENT**

### **Noxious Invasive Species**

*OACD supports efforts to maintain and update weed listings and weed information, detect weeds in the environment, educate citizens, plan responses, and eradicate noxious invasive species.*

Discussion: Efforts can be done through a variety of organizations including SWCDs. The Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Oregon Invasive Species Council (OISC) have existing plans and programs that should be supported. Formation of local weed control districts is encouraged. Efforts can

benefit from volunteer public participation, but state and local funding is needed for partnering with state, federal, and local agencies for successful programs.

### **Integrated Pest Management**

*OACD supports the use of integrated pest management to control or eradicate the various forms of pests including rodents, birds, insects, fungus, nematodes, bacteria and noxious invasive weeds.*

Discussion: Integrated pest management (IPM) relies on a combination of techniques such as biological control, habitat manipulation, modification of cultural practices, and use of resistant varieties. Pesticides are used only after monitoring indicates they are needed while following specific label instructions, and treatments are made with the goal of removing only the target organisms. Pest control materials are used in a manner that minimizes risks to human health and the environment.

## **11. MISCELLANEOUS POSITION STATEMENTS**

### **Endangered Species Act (ESA) Assistance**

*OACD supports financial and technical assistance to help landowners and land managers comply with legal requirements because of ESA actions.*

Discussion: ESA compliance can be expensive and disproportionately affect some landowners and managers, yet the benefit of compliance is widespread. Assistance should support the restoration of healthy populations of listed species while minimizing the economic disruption to communities, businesses, and individuals.

### **Safe Harbor**

*OACD supports safe harbor agreements that provide protection to landowners who engage in voluntary conservation programs.*

Discussion: Participation in voluntary conservation involving threatened and endangered species can put the landowner at risk of assuming additional unintended responsibilities under environmental laws. To encourage participation, safe harbor agreements that limit landowner liability when they are acting in good faith should be made available.

### **Expand Participation in Conservation Programming**

*OACD holds that SWCDs, and their constituents are best served by broad and diverse participation in conservation and working lands programming, and supports efforts that encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion in such*

*programming throughout the state as recognized in OACD's adopted Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Statement.*

Discussion: OACD recognizes that gaining the perspectives of, and working with, diverse communities increases the strength, resiliency, and future viability of the state's conservation and working lands programming. OACD supports conservation and working lands legislation that aligns with its position statements, and that also results in the inclusion of, but not limited to, community members of all ages, genders, and historically under-served and under-represented groups including people of color, tribal members, and rural communities.