

State Representative
Cliff Bentz
House District 60

PRESS RELEASE: March 16, 2015

CONTACT: Representative Cliff Bentz
503-986-1460



Rep. Bentz Sage Grouse Habitat Funding Bill Hearing Set

SALEM—House Bill 3334, which would require the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) to allocate \$2 million per year for five years from its Watershed Conservation Grant Fund (lottery money) to restore sage grouse habitat, has been scheduled for a public hearing on Tuesday, March 17th at 8:00 a.m. (PDT).

Rep. Brad Witt (D-St. Helens) Chair of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, will conduct the meeting. If passed, the bill will be sent to the Joint Ways and Means Committee for further review.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must decide, on the record established before September 30th 2015, whether or not to place the Greater Sage Grouse on the Federal Endangered Species List.

If listed, land designated sage grouse “core habitat” (both public and private) will be subject to substantial federal restrictions on use. These restrictions would affect cattle grazing, mining, utility corridors, roads, fencing, and recreational activities on millions of acres of Eastern Oregon lands.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife has indicated that a “dedicated funding stream for grouse habitat restoration would reduce the chance of listing,” said Rep. Bentz, “Hopefully this already existing source of money will encourage the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to reach a decision not to list.”

Rep. Bentz, with the help of Judge Steve Grasty (Harney County) and Debi Bainter (Baker County) is arranging for Harney and Baker County residents to testify via video conference. The locations for the video link are:

- Baker County OSU Extension Office, 2600 East St., Baker City---8:00 Pacific Daylight time;
- Harney ESD Office, 25 Fairview Heights, Burns, OR, 97720---8:00 Pacific Daylight time;

“It would have been great to have had Jordan Valley and Lakeview residents also testify, but the necessary video equipment and space for the set up was not readily available in those areas” said Rep. Bentz.

Those interested can also watch the hearing live online at:

https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/citizen_engagement/Pages/Legislative-Video.aspx.

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258 S. Oregon St., P.O. Box 1027, Ontario, OR 97914

900 Court St. NE, H-475, Salem, OR 97301

rep.cliffbentz@state.or.us