

State Representative
Cliff Bentz
House District 60

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CONTACT: Representative Cliff Bentz
503-986-1460



Bentz Bill for CCAA Protections Goes to Governor

SALEM— On Friday, February 28th, Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) carried House Bill 4093, which expands confidentiality protections for landowners who enter into Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs), to a 58-1 concurrence vote. The bill is now on its way to the Governor for final approval. Bentz previously carried the bill to a 52-0 vote on Feb. 14th. It passed out of the Senate (24-5) on Feb 26th before being sent back to the House for concurrence to a Senate amendment limiting the bill's impact to sage grouse.

House Bill 4093, if signed by the Governor, will expand an existing state public records exemption to include landowners who decide to voluntarily participate in a CCAA for the conservation of sage grouse. The bill's purpose is to protect information that landowners include in site specific plans submitted to participating agencies. The number of landowners entering into these agreements will play a significant part in the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's determination of whether or not the sage grouse is to be added to the Endangered Species list.

Landowners are justifiably concerned that if the material they submit for CCAAs (which includes their names, addresses, ranch location, pasture size, and other detailed information about their land and how they use it) becomes public knowledge, such information in the wrong hands could threaten food safety, lead to increased trespassing and vandalism, decrease property values, and possibly endanger the privacy and security of the landowner's family.

Rep. Bentz said, "The Legislature has taken a very positive step toward protecting land owner's confidential information, which may encourage people to enter into CCAAs. If they decide to do so, their entry into these agreements will protect their business and the bird, thus making it less likely the USFWS will list the grouse. I believe that land owners should seriously consider entering into a CCAA because their participation would protect them from the regulation that will occur if the grouse is listed, and at the same time, will reduce the very real chance of a listing. The listing of the grouse could dramatically limit important and essential activities such as grazing, fencing, road use, or mining, be such activity on private or public land. Such regulation would damage local communities, businesses, recreation, ranching operations, schools, and rural populations across Eastern Oregon."

The passage of House Bill 4093 is the product of a collaborative effort between Rep. Bentz, Rep. Whitsett, Senator Whitsett, the Governor's Office, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, and the Oregon Chapter of the Audubon Society, the Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society, the Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, local ranchers, and many others.

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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