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June 22, 2023

House Committee on Rules
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Testimony SB 70-A

Chair Fahey, Vice Chairs Kropf and Breese-Iverson, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Central Oregon LandWatch ("LandWatch"), thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to this bill. LandWatch is a conservation organization which for more than 36 years has protected Central Oregon's forests and high desert, rivers and springs, fish and wildlife, and vibrant communities. We work to conserve the region's ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and working rural lands balanced with a responsible, sustainable approach to planning and fostering thriving communities.

LandWatch respectfully opposes SB 70-A's proposed change in the definition of "high value farmland" in the Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region ("Border Region"). The current definition of "high value farmland" reflects a careful balance between increased opportunities for housing options in the Border Region on the one hand and protecting farmlands on the other. This balance should be maintained, and SB 70-A should not proceed.

SB 70-A would exclude from the definition of "high value farmland" lands within irrigation districts and lands within the federally designated Snake River Valley viticultural area. Both of these classes of land are included in the current definition of "high value farmland" for good reason. Lands in irrigation districts have access to water. Lands in the viticultural area have the unique qualities necessary for vineyards. Both classes of land are in limited supply in our state and should be preserved to the maximum extent possible.

In considering SB 70-A in this, the fiftieth anniversary year of the statewide land use planning system, LandWatch urges the Committee to be mindful of Oregon's statewide agricultural land use policy. That policy calls for "the preservation of a maximum amount of the limited supply of agricultural land in Oregon as necessary to the conservation of the state's economic resources and calls for the preservation of such land in large blocks as necessary to maintain the agricultural



Protecting Central Oregon's Natural Environment And Working For Sustainable Communities

economy of the state and for the assurance of adequate, healthful, and nutritious food for the people of this state and nation.” ORS 215.243.

SB 70-A would unnecessarily open up farmland for housing in the Border Region, placing the Border Region's agricultural economy and way of life at risk. The Oregon Department of Agriculture recognizes this area as a leading producer of onions, sugar beets, and a wide variety of other crops. Throughout changing times agriculture has been a stable, reliable economic sector in the Border Region that the legislature should work to protect.

As the history of Oregon agriculture has shown again and again, protecting agricultural land is a winning economic strategy for the state as a whole and for the Border Region in particular. For the future of the strong agricultural economy of the Border Region, and for the sake of the quality of life of the residents of the Border Region, we respectfully urge you to vote no on SB 70-A.

Respectfully submitted,



Ben Gordon
Executive Director

