

Submitter: Mike Houck

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Rules

Measure: HB3414

I have worked in the arena of land use and natural resource protection for over forty years, starting with conducting Goal 5 inventories for Washington County and numerous other cities in the Portland metropolitan region. I also worked on Metro's regional growth management program in the 1990's and served for 11 years on the City of Portland's Planning and Sustainability Commission. I am intimately familiar with the land use system and the role that natural resource protection fits into the overall planning system. Providing housing and natural resource protections are both critical to creating vibrant, healthy cities. HB 3414 is counter to the intentions of the land use system which is intended to integrate the Goals, not pit one against another. Protection of natural resources in the urban environment is critical to people's physical and mental health, economic health of the city and region, climate mitigation and adaptation, and a host of other benefits. There is absolutely no justification for weakening environmental protections to provide more housing.

HB 3414 would result in one of the biggest rollback of urban environmental protections since the state-wide land use system was adopted. It is a giveaway to housing developers at the expense of our communities and environment, allowing them to bypass regulations to protect trees, wetlands, floodplains, and high value habitat. HB 3414 would force municipalities to give variances against important regulations regardless of whether a developer is building affordable housing or a giant mansion. A developer could apply for an unlimited number of variances.

At a time when communities are increasingly aware of the importance of protecting urban natural resources to protect our air and water quality, biodiversity, access to nature, and to advance climate resilience and environmental justice, HB 3414 gives housing developers the ability to circumvent most if not all the urban environmental protections that have been put in place over the past several decades. It kicks efforts to increase the environmental health of our urban landscapes into hard reverse.

Respectfully,

Mike Houck, Director Emeritus  
Urban Greenspaces Institute  
Portland, OR