



March 22, 2023

Economic and Small Business Committee
Oregon State Legislature

Re: HB 3317 Relating to Wallowa Rural and Recreational Economic Development Region; declaring an emergency

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Morgan, and Nguyen, and Members of the Committee

First let me thank Rep Levy and Commissioner Hillock for their leadership on this issue.

Wallowa Resources is in full support of H.B. 3317. As designed, the bill addresses critical constraints to economic development and community prosperity – specifically housing and labor shortages in Wallowa County. These constraints are broadly recognized across the public and private sector – and are a clear priority for the citizens of our county. All of us here today have experienced increasing challenges in recruiting and retaining key staff to run our businesses. Its affecting the private sector, as well as a range of critical health care and community services – including law enforcement and public safety.

We understand that many rural counties face similar constraints. New ideas are needed. A little R&D, some targeted innovation, might generate policy and institutional lessons that would have broad benefits across the State.

I was shocked to learn labor shortages due, in part, from the lack of housing in Wallowa County, were also affecting our eligibility for some federal economic development programs – like the EDA’s Recompete Program. Primary eligibility is driven by the gap in prime workforce age employment. Since our labor supply is constrained by the lack of housing – almost everyone that is prime working age is working. But we lag on most other criteria of economic prosperity – we clearly need investment in job and business creation, to bring working age people back, and enroll more kids in our schools.

Through HB 3317, and the new economic development structure that is created, we can organize and align efforts within our county, and build strong public-private sector partnerships to address the two most critical factors affecting our economy today and our future.

Thank you for your support of this important initiative.

Nils D Christoffersen
Executive Director