

Chair Golden, Vice-Chair Girod, and colleagues.

I'm Michael Dembrow, the Senator for District 23, NE/SE Portland.

It's my honor to bring before you SB 530, the Natural Climate Solutions Act, a bill that recognizes the extreme value that the natural and working lands of this state provide to this country and to this planet. During the years of contentious debate over climate action, what we have increasingly come to understand is the potential that Oregon's natural resources—our croplands, rangelands, wetlands, coastal marshes, forests (including our urban canopies), above the ground, below the ground, and in our waters—to help us slow down and ultimately reverse the ravages of climate change. Centralizing sequestration and natural storage as a key part of Oregon's action on climate is what SB 530 is all about. It's about making our natural lands more productive, more resilient in the face of a changing climate, and benefiting Oregon's forest owners, farmers, ranchers, and those who work for them, by making them the recipients of state and federal investments in natural climate solutions.

What, you might ask, are “Natural Climate Solutions”? SB 530 defines NCS in the following way:

“Natural climate solution’ means an activity that enhances or protects the ability of natural and working lands to sequester and store carbon, or reduces greenhouse gas emissions from natural and working lands, while maintaining or increasing climate resilience, human well-being and biodiversity.”

From a high-level perspective, here's what the Natural Climate Solutions bill does:

It defines natural and working lands and Natural Climate Solutions for the first time in statute and establishes policy direction to advance Natural Climate Solutions.

It creates the Natural and Working Lands Fund, which braids federal and state funding to provide dedicated funding for voluntary Natural Climate Solutions projects. It positions Oregon to leverage significant new federal funding and private investments as a leader in natural climate solutions.

It directs a comprehensive Oregon inventory of the sequestration and storage capacity for Oregon's natural and working lands to create the baseline that will allow us to monitor our progress and prioritize future investments. It will also direct a workforce analysis to help us understand and track the economic benefits that come from this work.

Finally, it funds and directs state agencies to work together to access these funds provide incentives and technical support to forest owners, farmers, and ranchers to implement Natural Climate Solutions on Natural and Working Lands. Building on existing resources like the Oregon Global Warming Commission, the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, the Oregon Agricultural Heritage Program, and OSU technical

assistance, it will create a coordinated approach to spur action in the field and make best use of those federal resources.

Colleagues, obviously, even with significant federal investments in natural climate solutions, we're going to have to prioritize sequestration projects that bring us multiple benefits. Whether we're talking about projects that have economic benefits, those that increase our supply of clean water, improved wildlife habitat, soil stability, or protection from wildfire, natural climate solutions have the potential to bring multiple, multiple benefits for Oregonians throughout the state.

Colleagues, I saw the list of those who had signed up to testify a couple of days ago, and I'm sure there are many more since then. I can tell you that you are going to hear example after example of the kinds of projects that this long-overdue piece of legislation will make possible. You're going to hear from farmers, ranchers, timber operators from all over the state with their ideas of how to move forward.

As an aside, I have to share my delight in seeing on the list Jeanne Carver from Shaniko Wool Company, whose incredible ranching operation outside of Maupin I was able to explore last summer. I can tell you you're in for a treat.

I've been hearing from people like Jeanne over the last few years, asking me when Oregon's climate action agenda will return to prioritizing the needs of rural Oregon. Whether they're farmers or small timber owners or ranchers or rural county commissioners, they want to know how they can be supported in their desire to preserve the health of their soils while doing their part to fight climate change and preserve the economic viability of their lands and operations.

Before you hear from those who've signed up to testify, though, it's my pleasure to introduce to you Cathy Macdonald, the hard-working volunteer chair of Oregon's Global Warming Commission. I can tell you that she has done remarkable work in that role, on her own time and her own dime. Coming out of her work with the highly-respected Nature Conservancy, her professional background blends environmental action and productive use of our natural resources. Cathy will say something about the Commission's years of work on Natural and Working Lands that ultimately lead to the bill that is before you.

Colleagues, I can tell you that I've heard from advocates on all sides of this debate with suggestions for amendments to the bill. I've decided not to submit any of them until after this hearing. I look forward to hearing the ideas and suggestions and concerns from everyone who testifies. We want this to be the best bill possible. Colleagues, I'll close by returning to the words with which I opened. Oregon is uniquely positioned to be a leader in the sphere of natural climate solutions. Like all of our colleagues in other states, we have an obligation to do our part in reducing our GHG emissions as much as we can as quickly as we can, in line with the best current science. However, we in Oregon, blessed as we are with so many natural riches, can do more and can do it in a way that benefits our state's economy and the livability of our communities. Let's do it.