

PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release

LandWatch appeals controversial rezone of 710 acres of farmland

On January 4, Central Oregon LandWatch filed a Notice of Intent to Appeal the Deschutes County Board of County Commissioners' (BOCC) decision to remove agricultural land protections on 710 acres near Terrebonne. The appeal will go to the Oregon Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) over Deschutes County's decision to rezone the agricultural property for rural residential development.

The application to rezone 710 acres in the Lower Bridge Valley was initially submitted to Deschutes County last spring. It has been the subject of widespread public opposition and concerns over groundwater use, loss of farmland, infrastructure strain, and impacts to wildlife.

LandWatch took a stand against the proposal alongside hundreds of concerned residents, including neighboring ranchers who told the Board of Commissioners they would be interested in leasing the land to expand their ranch.

Oregon's land use laws protect agricultural land for farm use by strictly limiting housing on farmland. The laws are intended to keep prices low enough for farmers to buy land or expand their operations.

At a public hearing before the BOCC in August, Abby Kellner-Rode with Boundless Farmstead expressed her strong opposition to the development.

“Speculation in farm and ranch land has artificially increased the price of farmland, so much so that farmers and ranchers are getting priced out of the ability to buy land,” she testified.

Other people expressed fears over dropping groundwater levels and the impact seventy-one new wells will have on the aquifer and existing wells. The Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) submitted a [joint, three-agency letter](#) opposing the development, in which they noted the risks to the aquifer, fish, and wildlife and recommended denial.

The development would threaten local wildlife habitat by fragmenting and developing currently intact habitat areas. Over a year ago, ODFW provided Deschutes County with new scientific data showing these 710 acres proposed are important mule deer and elk habitat, part of one of the largest blocks of big game habitat remaining in Deschutes County.





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“With local mule deer herds declining rapidly, we need to protect the remaining habitat in Deschutes County. We believe the decision is contrary to applicable law protecting farmland for farm use and directing growth inside urban growth boundaries, and we will take the issue up with the Land Use Board of Appeals on behalf of Central Oregon and our supporters,” said Ben Gordon, Executive Director of LandWatch.

In December, the Deschutes County Commission adopted a decision to approve the application to rezone the area to allow 71 residential plots in a 2-1 vote. Both Commissioners Patti Adair and Tony DeBone voted to support the rezone, while Commissioner Phil Chang opposed.

The appeal will go before Oregon’s Land Use Board of Appeals. A decision is expected this spring.

As a watchdog for Central Oregon, we will continue to defend against inappropriate development on rural lands, support agricultural economies, and protect open space, wildlife, and water. LandWatch will continue to oppose the County’s decision through the appeals process.

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