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1000 Friends of Oregon Challenges Flawed Urban Reserves Proposal

Appeal Will Request Better Protections for High-Value Washington County Farmland

Portland, Oregon – September 5, 2012 – 1000 Friends of Oregon announced today that it is challenging Metro’s urban and rural reserves plan. The plan, designating over 28,000 acres as future urban land, was recently approved by the Land Conservation and Development Commission, bringing 1000 Friends to petition the Oregon Court of Appeals for judicial review on behalf of several local farmers.

1000 Friends objects to the urbanization of thousands of acres of the best agricultural lands in the heart of the Tualatin Valley. Despite state law requiring a balancing between urban and rural needs, Metro and Washington County designated these highest-quality farm lands for future urban expansion.

“Inefficient sprawl has been consuming Oregon farmland for decades,” said 1000 Friends Executive Director Jason Miner. “Once it’s gone—it’s gone. We have an obligation to future Oregonians to urbanize this land only as a last resort. The region has already identified a \$10 billion backlog in infrastructure repair and maintenance. Locking a regional asset like farmland it up for future development simply adds to that burden, by committing taxpayers to millions of dollars of additional roads, sewers, and other infrastructure for unneeded sprawl.”

Among Oregon counties, Washington County ranks sixth for farm sales, reflecting the Tualatin Valley’s highly productive soils and long agricultural heritage. The county’s agricultural industry is a core sector of its economy that continues to increase in value. “Oregonians have made clear for decades that they want to protect high quality farmland, which directly supports thousands of jobs and contributes billions of dollars to Oregon’s economy, from unnecessary and expensive urban development,” said Miner. “This reserves plan proposes a vision in which Washington County cities continue sprawling onto some of the state’s best farmland, rather than focusing investment in existing neighborhoods.”

Most of the rural reserves designated by Washington County are in areas with no realistic chance of development in the next fifty years, and thus have no need for a reserve overlay. Yet where high-quality farmland met the criteria for either urban or rural reserve, the county and Metro chose urban or undesignated in almost every case.

“It’s easy to designate rural reserves in places where development won’t happen anyway, but the legislature intended rural reserves to protect land actually threatened by development,” Miner said. “Making the easy choice isn’t the Oregon spirit. We make hard decisions; the right decisions. We make decisions on a realistic and factual assessment of long-term needs and values. This proposal falls well short of that standard.”

About 1000 Friends of Oregon: 1000 Friends of Oregon is a nonprofit charitable organization with offices statewide. Founded in 1975, 1000 Friends works with Oregonians to enhance the state’s quality of life by building livable urban and rural communities, protecting family farms and forests, and conserving natural areas.

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