



# FARM & RANCH PROTECTION PLAN 2022-2026



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# ABOUT OREGON AGRICULTURAL TRUST

Oregon Agricultural Trust (OAT) is a land trust that was launched in 2019 to address the growing need to preserve agricultural lands in Oregon. Our mission is to partner with farmers and ranchers to protect agricultural lands for the benefit of Oregon’s economy, communities, and landscapes. OAT is committed to permanently protecting agricultural land and helping it stay in production, primarily through the use of working land easements. In addition to direct agricultural land protection, OAT advocates for strong state and federal conservation programs, offers technical assistance, and provides education about why and how to preserve farmland and plan for succession. OAT serves farmers, ranchers, agricultural service providers, and the public.

# CONSERVING AGRICULTURE—WHY NOW?

Agriculture plays an important role in Oregon’s culture and economy. From the fertile Willamette Valley to the vast grazing lands in the Southeast, Oregon produces over 220 different agricultural commodities. Currently more than 37,200 farms and ranches exist in Oregon across 16 million acres. However, the future of agriculture is uncertain. The current generation of producers is aging, and almost two-thirds (10.5 million acres) of agricultural land will change hands in 20 years. Meanwhile, rising land costs and other barriers are making it difficult for beginning and historically disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to access agricultural land. Additionally, growing development pressures impact the economic viability of continued agricultural production due to urban expansion, rezoning, or non-farm uses on agricultural lands. Finally, climate change threatens the agricultural landscape of Oregon with long-term impacts to rural communities, the economy, and the natural environment.

In light of these threats, Oregon’s farms and ranches should be protected because:

- Protected agricultural land can stabilize and anchor the local agricultural network.
- Agriculture is a major economic driver.
- Agriculture promotes local economies and food systems.
- Agriculture can preserve community character and culture.
- Agriculture can positively impact the environment.
- Agriculture can increase social equity.



## PURPOSE OF OAT'S FARM & RANCH PROTECTION PLAN

Oregon Agricultural Trust is committed to protecting Oregon's agricultural land in an impactful and enduring manner. OAT's Farm and Ranch Protection Plan directs the efforts of OAT staff, Board of Directors, funders, and supporters toward the high priority areas for agricultural land protection in Oregon. In addition to identifying these areas for protection, the plan addresses the challenges to agriculture unique to each region, and recommends specific strategies and tactics for addressing those challenges in each Focus Region. Finally, it provides the metrics and performance indicators which allow OAT to measure its impact. These things together allow the organization to align resources and capacity in support of a shared vision.

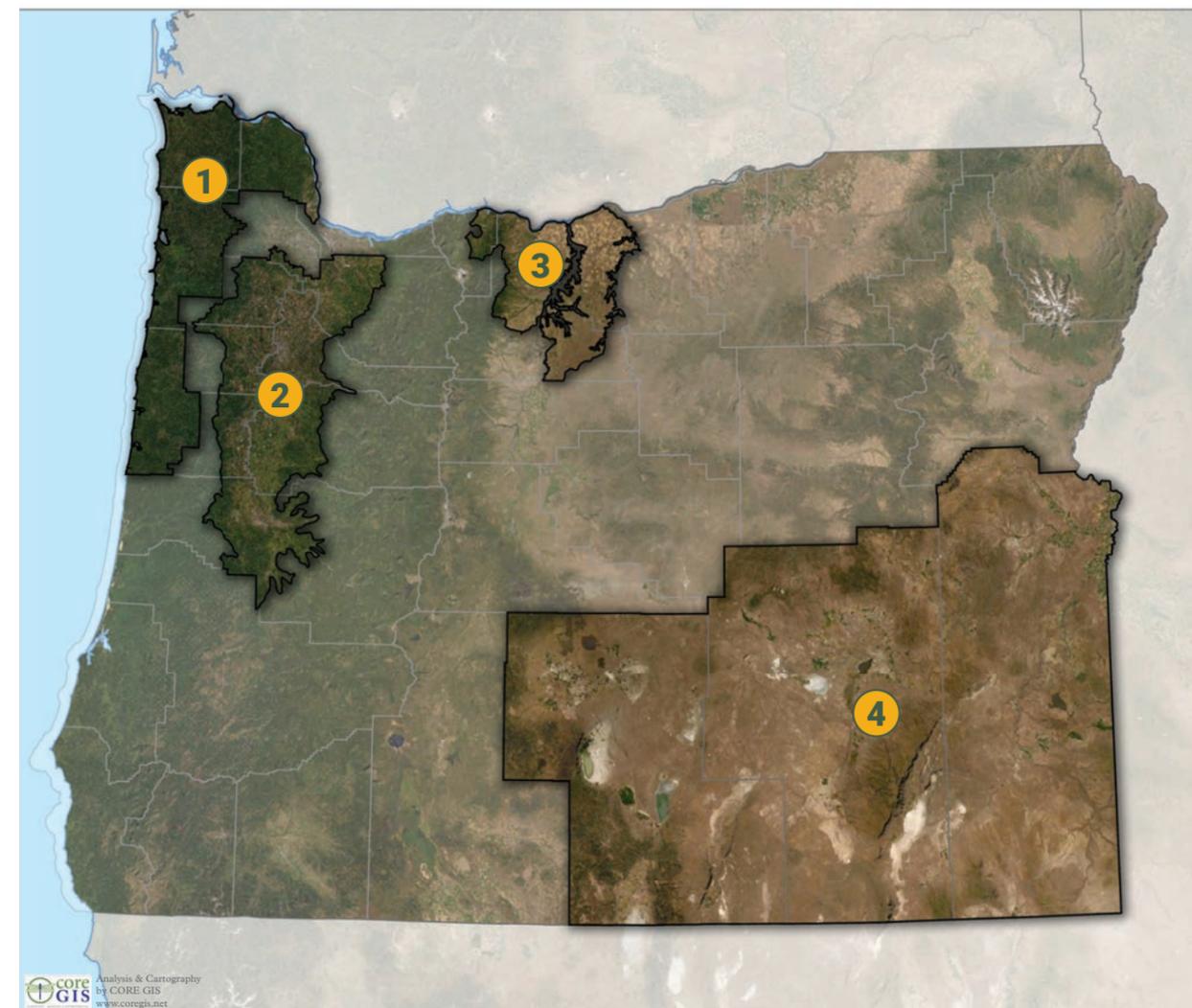
### OAT's Focus Regions are:

- North Coast (Multnomah, Columbia, Clatsop, Tillamook, and Lincoln Counties)
- Mid/South Willamette Valley (Washington, Yamhill, Clackamas, Marion, Polk, Benton, Linn, and Lane Counties)
- Mid-Columbia (Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties)
- Southeast Oregon (Lake, Harney, and Malheur Counties)

## CREATING INVESTMENT ZONES

To focus OAT's work on the highest value resources, land protection staff identified Investment Zones where OAT could achieve the greatest impact within our mission. They used geographic information system (GIS) technology to locate areas of opportunity and concern noted in stakeholder surveys and interviews. They created several resource maps indicating either natural resources significant to agriculture (e.g., important farm soils, natural irrigation water supplies, high quality rangeland, etc.) or threats and resource conflicts to agriculture (e.g., threat from development, wildlife conflict, sea level rise, etc.).

The resource maps differed from region to region based on the circumstances of that region. Staff compared each of the maps, giving them different weighted scores based on their relative significance to agricultural protection. For example, while highly productive farm soils and quality grazing lands are both important, their significance differs by region based on the forms of agriculture there. Once the resource maps were selected and given weighted scores, they were overlaid and where resource scores intersected, their scores were added together for that spot on the landscape. This layered information allowed OAT to identify the most resource rich areas, which is where Investment Zones are concentrated.



1 North Coast 2 Willamette Valley 3 Mid-Columbia 4 Southeast Oregon



*“Working land easements are a critical piece of protecting ag land in Oregon. They provide a level of permanent protection that just doesn’t exist with the current land use program. It’s only with permanent protection that we’re going to feel secure that we really do have the farmland that we need for food production and the agricultural economy.”*

**LAURA MASTERSON | 47<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE FARM**

## NORTH COAST FOCUS REGION

OAT's North Coast Focus Region stretches from Sauvie Island and Scappoose lowland areas in the tidal reach of the Columbia River, downstream to the mouth of the Columbia, and south to Lincoln County. It includes the agricultural lands of Columbia, Clatsop, Tillamook, and Lincoln Counties, and the portion of Sauvie Island that lies in Multnomah County. Agriculture and timber production are cornerstones of the local economy. Predominant agricultural uses are dairy, livestock (cattle and sheep), hay production, and small scale produce.

## NORTH COAST INVESTMENT ZONES

North Coast Investment Zones are those areas with high quality agricultural soils unlikely to be impacted by sea level rise. They also contain areas with development threats from Measure 49 claims and values such as unconfined river valleys and drinking water resources.

### 1 *Tillamook*

The Tillamook Investment Zone is 8,000 acres and includes the fertile areas that are above the predicted impacts of sea level rise.

### 2 *Clatskanie*

At 8,500 acres, the Clatskanie Investment Zone sits within a protected floodplain of the Columbia River in Columbia County, just north of the town of Clatskanie. It contains the Beaver and Larson Sloughs and is directly adjacent to the deepwater Port Westward.

### 3 *Sauvie Island/Scappoose*

The Sauvie Island/Scappoose Investment Zone is approximately 24,800 acres of farmland on the Columbia River, just north of Portland. Sauvie Island is separated from the town of Scappoose by the Multnomah Channel.



## NORTH COAST GOALS & OBJECTIVES

### #1: Establish OAT as an active and respected agricultural land protection group.

- **1A:** Create and implement a multi-pronged landowner outreach strategy in each Investment Zone.
- **1B:** Complete 2 strategic conservation easement projects.
- **1C:** Directly and in partnership, protect/improve 500 acres of agricultural land.
- **1D:** Present OAT's Farm and Ranch Protection Plan to community leaders and seek their engagement in its implementation.
- **1E:** Annually track and report protected acres of high value farmland soils.



### #2: Demonstrate the effective use of conservation easements to reduce the cost of land in areas of high speculative real estate value.

- **2A:** Identify and partner with at least 1 landowner in transition to develop an agricultural conservation easement on their farm as part of the transfer of property to the next generation of farmers.



### #3: Collaborate with related agricultural and conservation partners to meet shared objectives.

- **3A:** Identify and participate in mutually beneficial partner coalitions.
- **3B:** Advance collaborative solutions for improving tide gate and irrigation infrastructure to improve drainage and irrigation management for producers, while simultaneously providing habitat benefits.
- **3C:** Advance collaborative solutions to improve water quality and maintain farmland viability.
- **3D:** Continue outreach to area tribes to discuss their goals for food sovereignty and agricultural development. Support those goals as requested and according to our capacity.

### #4: Build new and leverage existing local funding sources for purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

- **4A:** Advocate for the funding of strategic projects by Metro, area soil and water conservation districts, and other local programs.

### #5: Ensure that all local and regional planning efforts prioritize agriculture.

- **5A:** Identify and participate in local and regional planning efforts related to the landbase, natural resources, economic development, and food security.

## MID/SOUTH WILLAMETTE VALLEY FOCUS REGION

The 42,800-acre South Willamette Valley Investment Zone reaches from Junction City downstream to Oakville, encompassing Willamette Valley floodplain farmland in Lane, Benton and Linn Counties.

## MID/SOUTH WILLAMETTE VALLEY INVESTMENT ZONES

Mid/South Willamette Valley Investment Zones were determined based on GIS analysis of the presence of highly productive agricultural soils, threat of fragmentation, threat of residential development through Measure 49, presence of senior water rights, groundwater recharge capacity, and protection of source water for irrigation. Also taken into account, though with a lesser weight, were status as an American Viticultural Area, future precipitation models, anadromous fish habitat, and oak woodland and oak savannah habitat.

### 1 Yamhill/Carlton

The Yamhill/Carlton Investment Zone encompasses 32,800 acres in the foothills of the Oregon Coast Range. Located in Yamhill County, this Investment Zone largely overlaps with the Yamhill/Carlton American Viticultural Area (AVA).

### 2 Grand Island/French Prairie

The 56,000-acre Grand Island/French Prairie Investment Zone lies along the Willamette River from Grand Island to Champoeg in the French Prairie area. Highly productive soils, significant water resources, and remnant Oregon white oak habitat are found here.

### 3 Amity/Sheridan

The 32,700-acre Amity/Sheridan Investment Zone contains high value farmland between the Amity Hills and the Coast Range foothills. This area is highly productive, with large farmland holdings with significant water resources.

### 4 Mid-Willamette

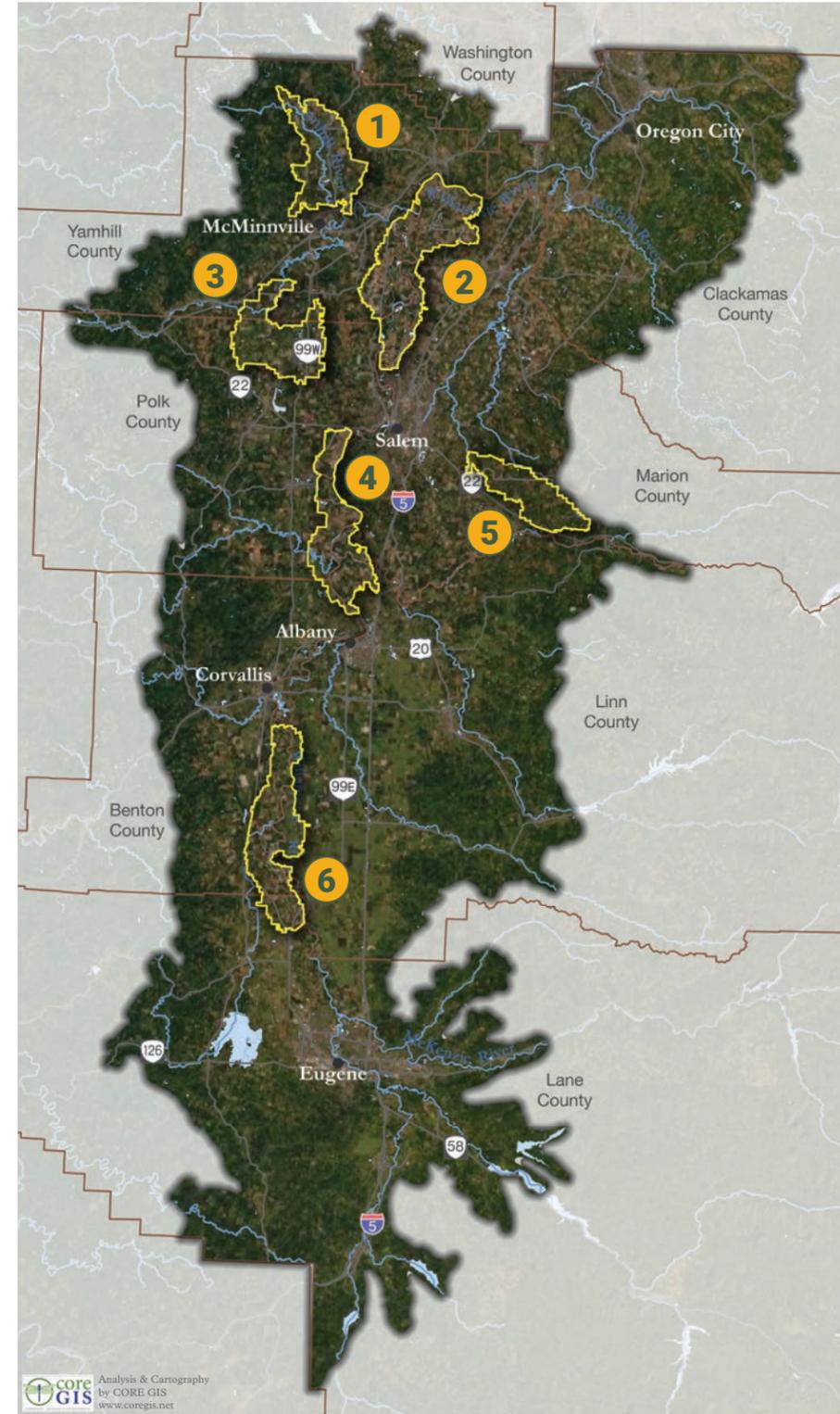
The Mid-Willamette Investment Zone encompasses 35,000 acres along the Willamette River floodplain from Albany downstream to Salem.

### 5 Waldo Hills

The Waldo Hill Investment Zone includes 23,700 acres at the base of the Waldo Hills in Marion County.

### 6 South Willamette

The 42,800-acre South Willamette Valley Investment Zone reaches from Junction City in Lane County downstream to Oakville in Linn County.



## MID/SOUTH WILLAMETTE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

### #1: Establish OAT as an active and respected agricultural land protection group in the Mid/South Willamette Valley.

- **1A:** Create and implement a multi-pronged landowner outreach strategy in each Investment Zone.
- **1B:** Complete 3 strategic conservation easement projects, including one with Oregon white oak woodland or savannah.
- **1C:** Directly and in partnership, protect/improve 1000 acres of ag land.
- **1D:** Present OAT's Farm and Ranch Protection Plan to community leaders and seek their engagement in its implementation.
- **1E:** Annually track and report protected acres of high value farmland soils.



### #2: Demonstrate the effective use of conservation easements to reduce the cost of land in areas of high speculative real estate value.

- **2A:** Of our 3 easement projects, identify and partner with 2 landowners in transition to develop agricultural conservation easements on their farms as part of the transfer of property to the next generation of farmers.



### #3: Collaborate with related agricultural and conservation partners to meet shared objectives.

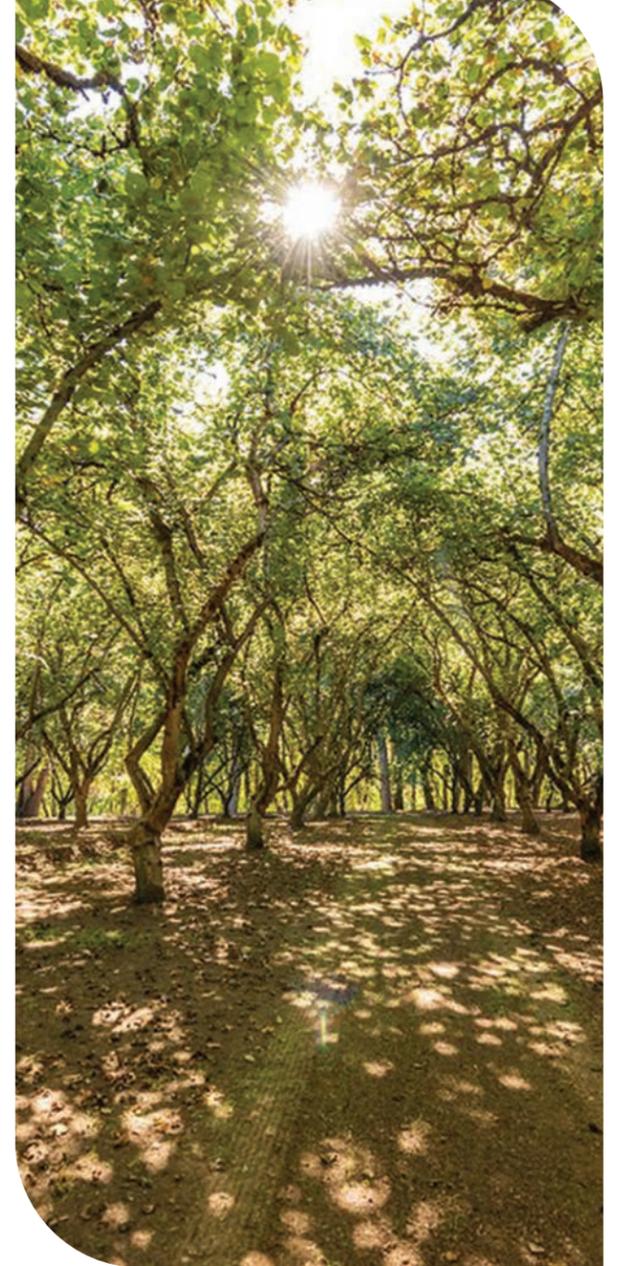
- **3A:** Participate in partner networks such as Coalition of Oregon Land Trust's (COLT's) Willamette Valley Easement Holder Group and the Willamette Valley Oak and Prairie Cooperative.
- **3B:** In partnership, develop an evaluation tool specific to Willamette Valley agricultural lands to identify those agricultural areas with highest agricultural land quality and most reliable water resources.
- **3C:** Leverage partnerships to develop soil health management plans for farmers throughout the region with the goals of conserving soil and water resources, improving habitat, and increasing climate resilience.
- **3D:** Continue outreach to area tribes to discuss their goals for food sovereignty and agricultural development. Support those goals as requested and according to our capacity.

### #4: Build a local funding source for purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

- **4A:** Support Upper Willamette Soil and Water Conservation District and other interested partners in the development of conservation easement grant programs.

### #5: Ensure that all local and regional planning efforts prioritize agriculture.

- **5A:** Identify and participate in local and regional planning efforts related to the landbase, natural resources, economic development, and food security.



## MID-COLUMBIA FOCUS REGION

The Mid-Columbia Focus Region is an area of dramatic transitional landscapes, from the glaciated peak of Mt Hood to the high, dry Columbia Plateau. Agricultural producers in this region undertake a variety of practices, with orchards predominating the north flank of Mt Hood in the Parkdale area and vast hay, wheat, and cattle grazing operations covering large parts of Sherman County. This region is also home to a thriving recreational and agritourism industry bolstered by the dramatic views of the Columbia River Gorge, and has seen rapid growth in renewable energy production.

## MID-COLUMBIA INVESTMENT ZONES

The Investment Zones of the Mid-Columbia were designated based on the location of high value agricultural soils, threat of development and fragmentation, presence of senior water rights, rangeland productivity, likelihood of solar development, and future precipitation models. To a lesser extent, staff also considered the presence of oak woodland and oak savannah habitat, protection of source water for irrigation, groundwater recharge, and anadromous fish habitat.

### 1 *Parkdale*

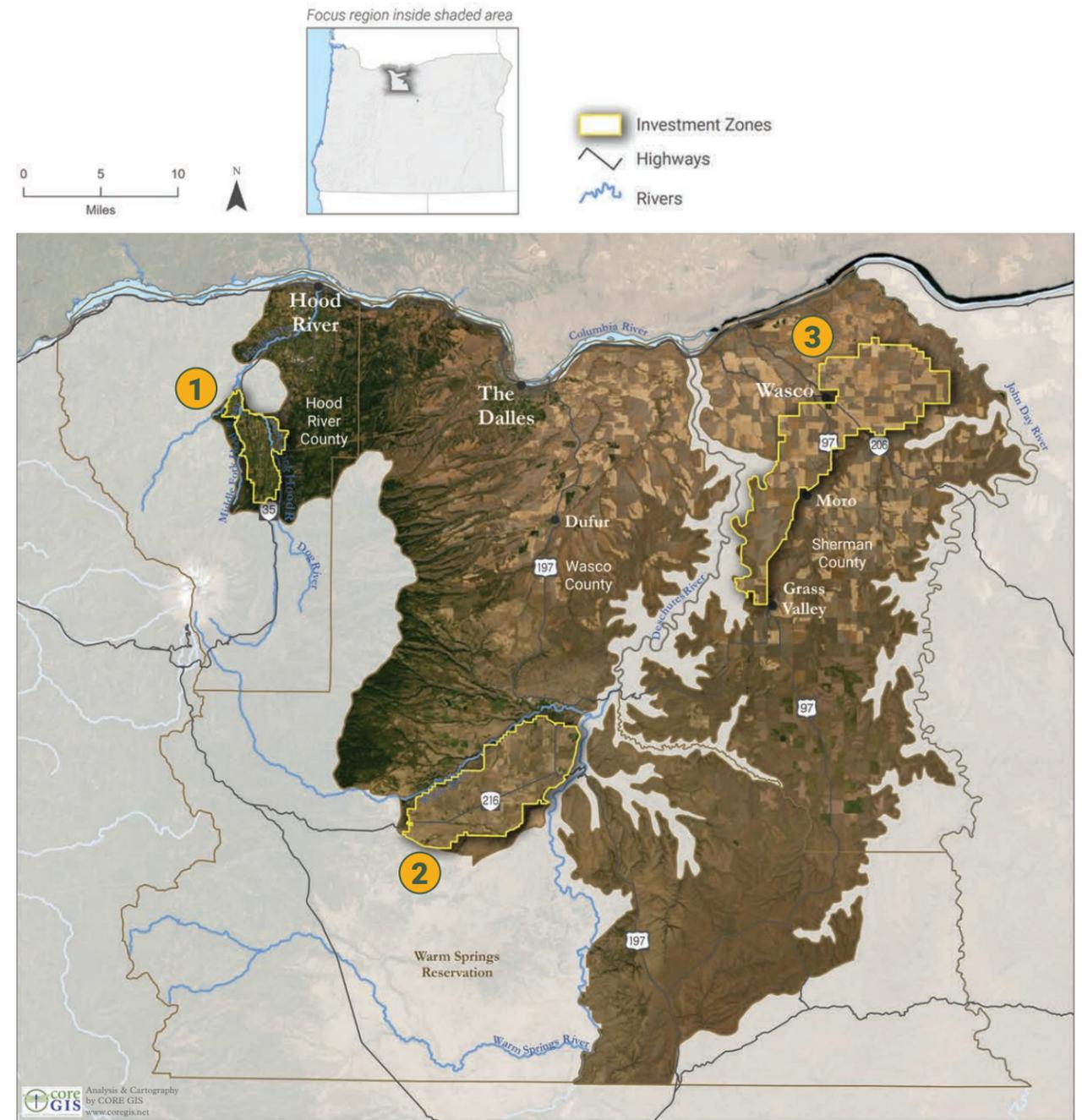
The Parkdale Investment Zone is approximately 12,000 acres of farmland located around the town of Parkdale in Hood River County. On the northern flank of Mt Hood, it is approximately 64 percent High Value Farmland.

### 2 *Juniper Flat*

The 45,000-acre Juniper Flat Investment Zone is in the Tygh Valley area of Wasco County. Juniper Flat is a high plateau of approximately 1,780 feet lying between White River and Wapinitia Creek. Crops in this area are primarily wheat, hay, and pasture.

### 3 *Sherman Plateau*

The Sherman Plateau Investment Zone is the largest in the Mid-Columbia Focus Region at nearly 65,000 acres. This wheat growing area lies between the John Day River on the east and the Deschutes River on the west with significant wind energy developments.



## MID-COLUMBIA GOALS & OBJECTIVES

### #1: Establish OAT as an active and respected agricultural land protection group in the Mid-Columbia Focus Region.

- **1A:** Create and implement a multi-pronged landowner outreach strategy in each of the Mid-Columbia Investment Zones.
- **1B:** Complete 3 strategic conservation easement projects.
- **1C:** Directly and in partnership, protect or improve 1,000 acres of farmland.
- **1D:** Present OAT's Farm and Ranch Protection Plan to community leaders and seek their engagement in its implementation.
- **1E:** For the sake of accountability, annually track and report protected acres of high value farmland soils.



### #2: Demonstrate the effective use of conservation easements to reduce the cost of land in areas of high speculative real estate value.

- **2A:** Of our 3 easement projects, identify and partner with 2 landowners in transition to develop agricultural conservation easements on their farms as part of the transfer of property to the next generation of farmers.



### #3: Collaborate with related agricultural and conservation partners to meet shared objectives.

- **3A:** Participate in partner networks such as Columbia Gorge Food Security Coalition, the East Cascades Oak Prairie Working Group, and others.
- **3B:** Leverage partnerships to advance protection and improvement of native pollinator habitat in close proximity to fruit producers.
- **3C:** Continue outreach to area tribes to discuss their goals for food sovereignty and agricultural development. Support those goals as requested and according to our capacity; e.g., partner with the Warm Springs Community Action Team to develop a tribal farm.

### #4: Build a local funding source for purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

- **4A:** Evaluate existing public partners for their willingness and ability to establish a conservation easement grant program for the Mid-Columbia Focus Region.

### #5: Ensure that all local and regional planning efforts prioritize agriculture.

- **5A:** Identify and participate in local and regional planning efforts related to the landbase, natural resources, economic development, and food security of the Mid-Columbia Focus Region.



## SOUTHEAST OREGON FOCUS REGION

Southeast Oregon is a vast desert expanse stretching from the easternmost flanks of the Cascade Range in Lake County's Warner Mountains to the Owyhee and Snake River Canyonlands on the border with Idaho. This landscape is part of the great American sagebrush sea, and is host to a rich and vital ranching culture, as well as most of Oregon's root crop production. Producers here are most impacted by land price inflation, wildfire and drought.

## SOUTHEAST OREGON INVESTMENT ZONES

To determine where to focus Investment Zones in this Focus Region, OAT staff considered water availability such as senior water rights and secure surface and groundwater supplies, high productivity agricultural soils, proven rangeland productivity, threats from subdivision and development, and more.

### 1 *Chewaucan River*

The Chewaucan River Investment Zone covers the valley bottom from Paisley to Valley Falls in a rift valley between the Abert Rim and the Gearhart Mountains.

### 2 *Goose Lake Basin*

The Goose Lake Basin Investment Zone covers all of the Oregon portion of the valley bottom around Goose Lake, flanked by the Warner Mountains and Willow Creek Hills in the south by the California state line.

### 3 *Forks of the Silvies*

The Forks of the Silvies Investment Zone is 48,155 acres in size, and includes the irrigated area immediately around and downstream of the forks to the south and east of the towns of Burns/Hines.

### 4 *Malheur River Headwaters*

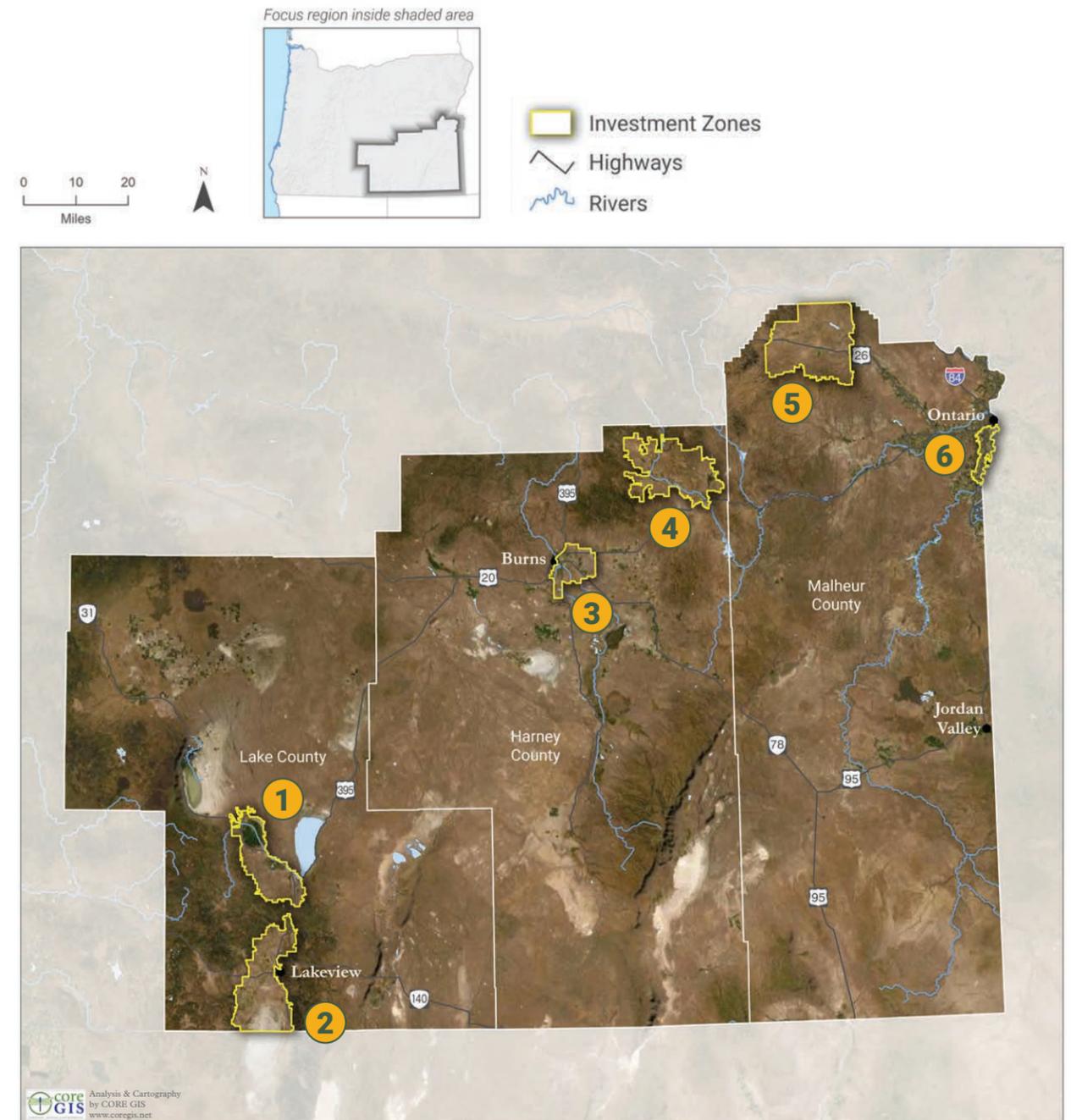
This Investment Zone of 98,525 acres covers the stream drainages in the Upper Malheur River basin, including the upper Malheur River, Otis Creek, Griffin Creek, and Wolf Creek. This region is distinct for its high quality rangeland and native wet pasture.

### 5 *Cow and Willow Creek Valley*

This Investment Zone of 174,841 acres in north Malheur County includes highly productive rangeland in Cow Valley, Lost Valley, and Willow Creek Valley, as well as surrounding rangeland.

### 6 *Treasure Valley/ Old Owyhee Ditch*

This 21,367-acre zone between the Owyhee Ditch and the Snake River, stretching from Ontario to a little south of Nyssa, has the oldest water rights in the region and a number of field crops.



## SOUTHEAST OREGON GOALS & OBJECTIVES

### #1: Establish OAT as an active and respected agricultural land protection group in the Southeast Oregon Focus Region.

- **1A:** Create and implement a multi-pronged landowner outreach strategy in each of the Southeast Oregon Investment Zones.
- **1B:** Complete 3 strategic conservation easement projects.
- **1C:** Directly and/or in partnership, protect or improve 8,000 acres of agricultural land, including at least: 2,000 acres of High Value Farmland; 2,000 acres of Irrigated Land; and 4,000 acres of high productivity rangeland.
- **1D:** Present OAT's Farm and Ranch Protection Plan to agricultural community leaders and seek their engagement in its implementation.
- **1E:** Generate and lead one multi-partner effort towards addressing a major issue in regional agriculture.
- **1F:** Work with willing farmers and ranchers with high-ranking properties outside of the Investment Zones if they approach OAT or are indicated within OAT's partnerships as highly valued for preservation.
- **1G:** For the sake of accountability, annually track and publish: number of acres of high value farmland; number of operations protected; number of operations made affordable; impacts on Animal Unit Months (AUMs); ownership of protected and restored lands and whether AUM wealth flows in or out of the community; and OAT's impacts on agricultural land affordability.

### #2: Demonstrate the effective use of conservation easements to assist with succession, consolidation, and liquidity.

- **2A:** Provide 6 landowner workshops in year 1, with 2 annually thereafter focused on succession planning and conservation easement benefits.
- **2B:** Develop long term strategy and/or partnerships towards facilitating new, beginning, and local rancher/farmer access to affordable agricultural lands.
- **2C:** Help farmers and ranchers gain liquidity through conservation easement sales to reinvest in or expand their operations.



### #3: Collaborate with related agricultural and conservation partners to meet the following mutual objectives.

- **3A:** Assist partners with improving drought and water resiliency.
  - **(i):** Work to support and grow partner efforts to increase natural storage capacity within watersheds via wetland restoration and other means.
  - **(ii):** Support and grow partner efforts in improving irrigation infrastructure.
  - **(iii):** Develop a calculator to assess the gains in irrigation capacity through wetlands and irrigation projects supported by OAT and report to the community.
- **3B:** Assist with wildfire prevention and mitigation.
  - **(i):** Develop a strategy for a community forage reserve accessible after fires or during required rest periods from annual grass treatments.
  - **(ii):** Support and grow partners' annual grass and juniper removal programs, as well as applications for pre-disaster or post-disaster mitigation assistance for fire.
- **3C:** Assist producers with navigating species regulations.
  - **(i):** Seek projects which are mutually beneficial to agriculture and wildlife and which reduce wildlife conflict.<sup>1</sup>
- **3D:** Continue outreach to area tribes to discuss their goals for food sovereignty and agricultural development. Support those goals as requested and according to our capacity.



### #4: Build a local funding source for purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

- **4A:** Evaluate existing public partners for their willingness and ability to establish a conservation easement grant program for the Southeast Oregon Focus Region.

### #5: Ensure that all local and regional planning efforts prioritize agriculture.

- **5A:** Identify and participate in local and regional planning efforts related to the landbase, natural resources, economic development, and food security of the Southeast Oregon Focus Region.

<sup>1</sup> OAT will not, however, execute easements that do not permit agriculture, and any provisions for wildlife must be truly net beneficial for agriculture with a minimal impact to the agricultural potential of the property.

## LEARN MORE

*If you'd like to protect your ag land,  
you can contact our Land Protection Team.*

**EMAIL: [HELLO@OREGONAGTRUST.ORG](mailto:HELLO@OREGONAGTRUST.ORG)**

**PHONE: 503-858-2683**

*If you'd like to learn more about OAT's programs, visit*

**[OREGONAGTRUST.ORG/PROGRAMS](https://OREGONAGTRUST.ORG/PROGRAMS)**

*If you'd like to get involved with OAT's work, visit*

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