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Written Commentary on HBCU-24-001
Coos County Community Development

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There are several serious concerns regarding the application for siting a golf course West of Laurel Grove and Dew Valley, as represented by Ocean River, LLC (Application HBCU-24-001). The rate of water usage for that recreational site, as reported in the previous Bandon Biota Appliaton of 2022 (Exhibit C, as prepared by Golder in 2018, of that proposal, is on file with the Coos County Development Planning Department and found on pages 59-69 and can be accessed at https://www.co.coos.or.us/sites/default/files/fileattachments/planning/page/23604/hbcu-22-001_bandon_biota.pdf ) was estimated at 400 cubic feet per second (cfs) / 149,492 gallons per minute (gpm) without seasonal restriction. That level of usage, presumably using the 17 un-righted wells already dug on the property that tap into the mid-level aquifer (50-100 feet) , will seasonally drain the entire basin, dry up surrounding wells, ponds, creeks and entire lakes in the area, causing an avoidable human, economic and environmental crisis.

Exhibit C of Bandon Biota's previous application states that it was compiled with nearby inferred information and that no comprehensive survey of the mid-level aquifer has ever been made; only preliminary testing was done in the 1980s. In practice, wells in this area are either shallow (less than 35 feet) or mid-level. The Exhibit 3 report does not differentiate between these, instead calling everything above 130ft as being shallow. In practice, the difference

between these two depths has hugely important during cranberry harvest, when the water table routinely drops below that 35 foot mark. A majority of the older residential wells and many of the local agricultural wells are less than 35 feet deep. It is common for older residential wells to run dry during and throughout the cranberry harvest season, despite re-using that water several times over to complete the harvest process.

Without knowing the nature, range and capacity of the surface and mid-level water tables, the proposed non-food horticultural use (turf-grass on sand without underlying peat or reclamation) of the proposed venture will overwhelm the local capacity to recharge both upper and mid-level aquifers. The deep aquifer is not sufficient to make up the difference according to their own well tests. The end result of such a disaster would be the loss of hundreds of acres of productive family farms that have been in the area for over 100 years. These farms contribute cattle, hay, pasture, horses, cranberries, blueberries, nursery crops, honey and a livelihood to scores of long-time locals. Indeed, my own agricultural operations are dependent upon a 55ft well that is in very real danger of being dried up by this development.

Moreover, with the proposed water use, it would be a matter of just a few years to drop the water level of both extremely shallow lakes enough to have significant impact on property values and the unique coastal ecosystem in the public lands served by Lost Lake. A similar situation has already happened when the already existing, adjacent Golf Course, Bandon Crossings, diverted creeks to keep their greens. It took 5 years for one of the creeks for which Twin Creek Ranch was named to dry up and the other to swell and flood out its banks with as little as a single inch of rain. Despite trapping people in three residences with these flood waters, there has been no action or compensation. And, despite having water rights that pre-date any others in the watershed, Mr. Leff had no actual recourse, instead getting

passed around from one agency to another on a yearly basis ever since, despite significant damage to the low-lands of his property. Approving this project would create this kind of damage multiplied by dozens of affected landowners and farmers.

It is also significant that a change from the proposed (and industry standard practice) turf-greens on sand with no reclamation ponds would make a significant difference in the amount of water required to irrigate this project. A proposed 17.45 cfs / 6,512 gpm transfer from these nearby agricultural lands represents just 4.3% of the proposed use. While the historical usage of 17.45 cfs is supported by the watershed in most years of normal rainfall, increasing the withdrawal from the local watershed by 2,300% to meet their proposed demand, would decimate the resource, even if the seasonal average of 60 inches were still normal. It has been well short of that for 7 of the last 10 years.

It is also highly concerning how much agricultural land has already been proposed to be taken permanently out of production with the transfer of water rights from cranberry and pasture operations. Moreover, Agriculture in the area is not limited to commodity production of cranberries. Other local farms have profitably diversified, as evidenced by the U-pick Blueberry Farms that have been planted in the past decade. There is certainly no lack of local demand for other crops or hay. There has been no decrease in the market value of either of those crops – low cranberry prices being the given reason for why they do not believe these lands are of High Value.

Indeed, lands owned by interests of the Kaisers have been left to suffer. Letting them lie fallow has resulted in the encroachment of certain noxious weeds that are of concern to everyone. In fact, lands that have been set aside for this project for as long as 40 years by

are significantly impacted by neglect and have grown up impenetrable stands of gorse. These are currently large enough to constitute a local fire hazard, cause adjacent landowners to address that threat their own fire plans and can be seen from space.

Perhaps most at the heart of this issue is a problem with the equivalency regarding the “crops” in question. The majority of the proposed water rights to be transferred are those assigned to both irrigation, “temperature control” and harvest of cranberries. In practice, all these waters are collected and reused many times over before being lost to evapo-transpiration (ET), which is the portion of water collectively lost to those processes in field agriculture. Standard operating procedure for recreational lands and golf courses in the area is to use relatively high rates of fertilization and irrigation, using coarse sand a substrate without the peat layer commonly found at the bottom of a cranberry bog specifically to retain moisture.

It is true that the Head of Horticulture for the project testified before the Planning Commission that they intend to use foliar fertilization on their cool-season turf-grasses to decrease the amount leaching into the water supply (as opposed to injecting fertilizers into the irrigation water, aka fertigation). However, this does nothing to impact the massive losses of uncollected water to the sea. These crops, as grown, are wildly dissimilar in their water needs.

Cranberries are a useful crop for this area because they are a water-wise plant that is tolerant of very low pH. While flood harvesting and bog cultivation seems like highly intensive uses of water, they are actually highly conservative. ET rates are determined by quite a few characteristics such as:

1. soil texture and underlyment
2. soil moisture levels
3. effective rooting zone
4. dormancy
5. growth rate
6. plant habit (sprawling vs. tall)
7. plant morphology (leaf shape and leaf surface)
8. wind levels
9. solar incidence
10. relative humidity

The proposed system would produce a plant without waxy leaves, shallow roots, high growht rate and no dormant season in a highly windy area that has very high solar incidence during the May-October irrigation season without reclamation. This differs in every way from how cranberries grow and function.

Additionally, I do not understand how a contiguous parcel that contains a significant amount (well over 20%) of High Value Farmland (HVF) could ever contain a Golf Course according to the stated rules. The purpose of that law is, pure and simple, to preserve farmland. Even if the areas designated as HVF are not actively being “golfed,” that land is forever unavailable to actual farming. It is very likely that the entire tract will be classified as HVF should the issue ever be appealed to the courts. That high-value crops can be farmed profitably on these lands has been proven for a century.

It is for these reasons that I respectfully request that you deny land use exemption application from Ocean River, LLC. / Michael Kaiser, in an effort to preserve both water and farmland for both residents and farmers.

Most Sincerely,

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