



DOUGLAS COUNTY COMMISSIONER CHRIS BOICE

Douglas County Courthouse, Room 217
1036 SE Douglas Avenue, Roseburg, Oregon 97470

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 30, 2023

Commissioner Boice Asked to Testify on Oregon House Bill 2253

(Douglas County, Ore.) Recently, Douglas County Commissioner Chris Boice was honored to be selected to testify before the Oregon State Legislature's [House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water](#) regarding [House Bill 2253](#): **“Relating to Farm Use Land Used for Illegal Growing of Crops; Prescribing an Effective Date.”** The bill's summary states, *“Disqualifies land from farm use special assessments upon final civil penalty or judgment of conviction for the illegal growing of crops against landowner or person in possession and control of land. Provides exception for landowner or other obligated taxpayer who reasonably lacked knowledge of illegal growing of crops or promptly notified law enforcement agency of illegal growing of crops.”*

On Thursday, January 19, 2023, Commissioner Boice joined the honorable [Senator David Brock Smith](#) (Oregon Senate District 1) and Scott Winkels from the [League of Oregon Cities](#), to testify as witnesses in a Public Hearing for the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources & Water, which is chaired by Representative Ken Helm from Oregon House District 27. Both Senator Brock Smith and Commissioner Boice discussed the negative impact and significant amount of resources deployed to combat illegal marijuana crops in Douglas County. Winkels spoke in support of the **HB 2253**'s intent to penalize landowners who knowingly allow illegal cannabis to be grown on their property by revoking their agricultural tax exemption status for up to five years.

According to Senator David Brock Smith, **HB 2253** was written with valuable input from the [Oregon Farm Bureau](#), the [Oregon Seed Council](#), and the [Oregon State Association of County Assessors](#) in order to quantify the serious consequences for landowners that knowingly engage in growing illegal cannabis. Senator Brock Smith stated that currently there are over 3,000 active illegal cannabis farms in Oregon necessitating an unprecedented use of local and state resources from County Sheriff's Offices and the Oregon State Police to combat the problem. **HB 2253** is designed so that resources would also flow back to the County's to help fund public safety and local law enforcement agencies ensuring those farmlands in violation would be disqualified from the special assessment.

Commissioner Boice opened his testimony supporting what the [Douglas County's Interagency Narcotics Team \(DINT\)](#) contends by reiterating that, *“The intent of this bill is to create an opportunity for landowners to think twice before allowing illegal cannabis operations to exist on their land. We love our agricultural producers and we support them in every way we can. We even have tax incentives in place for those who use their land accordingly.”*

35 Illegal Grow Sites Investigated by DINT in 2021

- 351,335 marijuana plants were seized. The previous record high was 27,000 plants seized in a single year.
- 68,674 pounds of dried/processed marijuana was seized.
- Some illegal grows were massive in land area; the largest was approximately 200 acres in size. Other well organized illegal grows packed large amounts of plants into relatively small two acre parcels.
- The number of affected property owners is difficult to quantify, however here are a few of the issues noted:
 - It has negatively affected entire rural communities, especially adjacent and surrounding property owners with pollutants such as piles of rotting trash; human waste and sewage; tremendous and often permanent ecological damage to ground, water and air from chemicals, herbicides and pesticides; and rodent infestations.
 - Nearby properties, who have legal water rights are dealing with super low water levels and have seen the rivers and creeks bled completely dry of water. Due to the misuse and overuse of local water resources, some surrounding properties had wells that went dry for the first time ever.

- Chemicals, herbicides and pesticide overuse and carelessness is incalculable and not thoroughly investigated. Grow sites tend to be located adjacent to waterways, making chemical contamination to water resources even more threatening, on top of the damage to the soil.
- Safety concerns for adjacent landowners, their families and their livestock/animals.
- A significant spike in crime rates in illegal grow areas where there had been historically low crime issues (including spikes in violent crimes).

52 Illegal Grow Sites Investigated by DINT in 2022

- 86,757 marijuana plants seized
- 30,227 pounds of dried/processed marijuana seized.
- The hemp market remains very low, making hemp production relatively unattractive for illegal growers. This also makes it harder for illegal marijuana growers to hide within the hemp industry.

Commissioner Boice wrapped up his testimony by noting the significant issues related to illegal crops shared by other affected counties in southern Oregon, *“These illegal crops put a real damper on the legal industry, but it goes much deeper than that. The DEQ is now involved because we have serious environmental issues that are related to the way the land is being used and the chemicals being applied. The Bureau of Labor and Industry is involved because of issues with the way that folks are being employed and housed and treated on the sites. There are Building and Planning code violations everywhere. Property values are being lowered at neighboring properties. The hope is to put some teeth into this ag exemption law that creates a situation where someone who knowingly grows illegal cannabis gets busted for it and potentially loses their tax exemption for up to 5 years. There are a lot of things to discuss, but this is what we are shooting for.”*

To listen to the complete recording of the January 19, 2023 public hearing on HB 2253 by the Oregon State Legislature’s House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water, [click here](#).

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Commissioner Chris Boice testifying in a virtual public meeting concerning HB 2253 with the Oregon State Legislature’s House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water on January 19, 2023.