

Tillamook County



Land of Cheese, Trees and Ocean Breeze

Board of Commissioners
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March 27, 2013

Representative Jules Bailey
House Energy and Environment
Committee Chair

RE: Support of HB 3451

Dear Representative Bailey:

Thank you for providing an opportunity for the House Energy and Environment Committee to consider HB 3451. This bill appropriates \$330,000 during the 2013-15 biennium for the operation of a research vessel in a manner designed to address issues of concern to Oregon scientists and public policy makers. It is an important step toward ensuring that Oregon will continue to play a leadership role in the research and management of our marine environment.

Tillamook County supports this bill for four reasons:

1. Funding research vessel operations assures the continued presence of a federally-funded vessel in Oregon;
2. Maintaining a vessel in Oregon provides over \$3 million in economic benefits that accrue to the central coast and the research community;
3. Federally-funded research vessels provide invaluable scientific information necessary to better understand the changes occurring along the Pacific Coast – changes that affect the safety, environmental quality, and productivity well beyond the territorial sea; and
4. Funding will support an effective opportunity for Oregon students to engage in research and see first-hand the exciting aspects of environmental research.

1. State support will help keep a Federal research vessel in Oregon.

For nearly 40 years Oregon has benefitted both economically and scientifically as from the presence of federally-funded research vessels operated by Oregon State University (OSU). Among those states that operate federally-funded vessels, Oregon is unique: We are the only state that provides no support for the operation of the vessels that are located in our ports. Rhode Island, with a coastline a fraction of ours and a population about a quarter of Oregon's, currently invests \$1 million per biennium to support a federal research vessel operated by the University of Rhode Island.

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As the federal government replaces its aging fleet, the lack of state support places Oregon in jeopardy of losing "our" vessel in favor of other states that contribute to the operation of their vessels. Lack of state support for operations translates to the loss of vessel days. And when evaluating its fleet, the federal government will more likely opt to dry-dock or not replace those vessels that are limited in their operation.

This issue is particularly important now, because earlier this year the National Science Foundation (NSF) recently awarded a \$3 million contract to OSU to design the next generation of research vessel intended to replace the vessel currently ported in Newport. This lucrative responsibility provides Oregon with a distinctive edge when it comes to deciding where to locate this vessel once it is constructed. However, lack of state support for vessel operations may counteract the benefits created by OSU's successful competition for the design contract.

2. Oregon currently realizes well over \$3 million/year in economic benefits as a result of the presence of the vessel in Newport.

The investment of \$330,000 during the 2013-15 biennium will begin a track record needed to retain an enterprise that currently provides over ten times that amount each year to the Central Oregon coast. The research vessel Oceanus currently contributes these economic benefits through the salaries paid to its crew, the maintenance contracts needed to keep it seaworthy, the fuel, supplies and other elements that support its operations, and the scientists and scholars who come to Newport to conduct their research. While the operation costs are expected to increase when the Oceanus is replaced by the next generation vessel, the return on investment will also increase given the magnitude of the expected economic benefits.

3. Federal research vessels create invaluable knowledge and information important to Oregon's economy, environment, and safety.

Ocean research is vital to all Oregonians, regardless of where we live. Ocean research vessels enable scientists to better understand the short-term and long-term changes in our coastal environment and how these changes affect our ocean resources – fisheries, coastline hazards, and other significant resources.

Ten days of ship time each year would enable a variety of scientific research and observation programs, as well as state agency operations and tasks. These efforts could include:

- Mapping of the sea floor in Oregon's territorial sea and analysis of marine ecosystems as part of proposed marine protected areas;
- Assessments of fisheries in conjunction with ODFW's new Nearshore Strategy; and

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- Deployment of instrumentation to support monitoring of the impacts of wave energy systems and marine reserves, etc.

The signs of significant and perhaps long term changes in our ocean ecosystems are now appearing and demonstrate the need for new investments that will ensure the long-term health and sustainability of our ocean and the people who depend on it. If Oregon fails to sustain operations of the Oceanus, it is quite possible that the West Coast leading edge ocean observation, research, and modeling would be conducted solely by the states to the north and south of us.

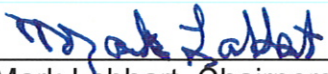
4. Funding will enable Oregon students to engage in environmental research

Education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) has been shown to be more effective when students are exposed to practical challenges and real-world opportunities. HB 3451 will provide Oregon students enrolled in any public university an opportunity to participate in science-based activities aboard an OSU research vessel. Students will be given advantages in a learning environment that are already provided to thousands of students in states throughout the country. By enabling students to define and compete for research efforts of their own, HB 3451 will create a leadership role for Oregon in the design of new curricula in STEM fields while also providing progress toward the State's 40-40-20 educational goal.

For these reasons Tillamook County urges the committee to approve HB 3451 so that it can be considered by the Joint Ways and Means Committee.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR
TILLAMOOK COUNTY, OREGON



Mark Labhart, Chairperson



Bill Baertlein, Vice Chairperson



Tim Josi, Commissioner