

From: [Ben Williams](#)
To: rep.chrisgorsck@state.or.us
Cc: [Rayburn Troy](#); [Winkel Karen](#)
Subject: House Bill 2696
Date: Wednesday, February 13, 2013 3:37:41 PM
Attachments: [Willamette Vally and French Prairie Aq Lands 10-12.pdf](#)

Rep. Gorsck;

This letter is coming to you as Vice-Chair of the House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development, to urge you to oppose House Bill 2696 relating to the Coastal Parkway toll way project.

The developers behind this project continue to search for ways to make it happen in spite of almost uniform opposition to it. This project is the wrong idea in the wrong place, for the following reasons:

- The North end of the Willamette Valley, known as French Prairie, has the best soils in the State and is virtually all zoned EFU.
- This is highly productive agricultural land and local farmers are not asking for a limited access road of any sort to cut through the middle of the state's most productive farm land.
- Virtually all the owners of large tracts of ag land have made it clear to the developer that they oppose the project and will not sell their land – they have a serious commitment to the land.
- A highway project of this sort would spawn significant business development along its course, taking further high quality farm land out of production.
- The Marion County Commissioners have twice passed a resolution opposing any form of highway across French Prairie, (most recently in 2006) and made clear in 2012 that opposition specifically included the Coastal Parkway.

Friends of French Prairie is a land use advocacy group, and an affiliate of 1000 Friends of Oregon, and we adamantly oppose this project and strongly urge you to assure that this bill for a toll way project proposed by Coastal Parkway LLC it does not proceed for consideration.

Should you not be aware of French Prairie's unique agricultural history and qualities, please quickly review the attached document.

Sincerely

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Testimony before House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

By Benjamin Williams, President, Friends of French Prairie. April 8, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to testify against House Bill 2696 before this Committee. I believe you all have the printed material I provided in advance. Before I start, in all seriousness, I would like to ask you all two questions.

One, where was the first democratic vote in western North America held?

Two, where did the first white Settlers in Oregon settle down to farm in the 1820's and '30's?

The answer to the first question is Champoeg. Specifically the site marked by a historical marker at Champoeg State Park, where on May 2, 1843, after Joe Mead called for "the divide," the settlers voted in the majority to align with the United States of America rather than Great Britain. That is what gave rise to Oregon Territory, and then in 1859 to Statehood.

The answer to the second question is French Prairie. That is where the original settlers, French Canadians whose fur trapping contract with the Hudson Bay Company expired, decided to settle because the land was so fertile. That was the beginning of agriculture in Oregon, in what later came to be referred to as "the Eden at the end of the Oregon Trail."

So what is before you is a Bill for a Coastal Parkway which will bifurcate French Prairie, the part of Oregon with the highest quality soils and the most productive agriculture land. A parkway that besides cutting French Prairie in half, will spawn a string of highway-based development from I-5 across the Willamette River to Dayton.

The whole idea is a travesty. This is not a problem in search of a solution. It is a promoter in search of profit, seeking ways to take advantage of the economy and the State's financial condition to sell a development project.

Do any of you remember when 15 or 20 years ago Disney proposed building a theme park near Gettysburg Battlefield? Do you remember why they finally withdrew? Because the response was not just opposition, it was the public clamor that the proposal was a travesty, and Disney finally backed down because they were shamed.

French Prairie is Oregon's historical and agricultural heartland. The opposition to this development proposal is overwhelming. So, I submit to you, that you should heed the opposition and not let it go forward. Avoid the shame that would go with advancing the development and destruction of French Prairie in this way