



2/13/13

Senator Arnie Roblan,
Chair, Senate Rural Communities and Economic Development Committee

Re: Senate Bill 331, Public Hearing 2/14/2013, 3:00 PM

Chair and Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Parks Association (OPA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 331. OPA has long been an advocate for affordable, local recreation opportunities available to Oregonians throughout the state. For decades OPA has represented a variety of public recreation agencies, always maintaining a strong membership with Oregon's county park providers. Our membership has endured many changes in how local governments deliver outdoor recreation facilities. Throughout these changing times, one thing has remained constant, Oregonian's deep rooted value of their parks and open space.

Counties play an active role in delivering outdoor recreation facilities as part of the statewide system of park providers. Specifically, counties provide a very important close-to-home recreational opportunity for many rural communities that do not have a strong presence by other providers. These facilities add to the overall strength of rural communities, providing an opportunity for active recreation, contributing to the health of Oregon's youth and stimulating the economic vitality of distressed communities. County parks provide over one third of valuable public water access sites in the state, allowing opportunities for Oregonians to recreate on the waters that they so avidly pursue. Additionally, when compared to Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD), counties provide a nearly equal amount of overnight camping facilities. These facilities bring tourists into parts of the state that may otherwise struggle to generate outside revenue. Perhaps more importantly, they provide a local and affordable camping experience that all families should be able to enjoy, regardless of today's fiscal reality.

As this committee is well aware, in recent years counties have faced some of the toughest economic challenges they have ever encountered. With the loss of federal timber payments, county budget committees have been forced to make very challenging decisions in an effort to fund mandated services. In many counties these decisions have been made at the expense of county park departments' budgets. As a result, county park programs have been removed from General Fund support in many cases. If not removed entirely, they have seen drastic cuts that severely affect their ability to provide continued services. From 2007 to 2012 county parks programs saw a 53% cut in General Fund support according to a recent study completed by EcoNorthwest titled "Deferred Maintenance Needs in Oregon's County Parks." County parks personnel have responded with an astounding sense of resiliency, taking on the challenge with the strong belief that their services are

a benefit to the community! In conjunction with the power of a positive attitude and responsible fiscal management, innovation, collaboration, and increased efficiencies have enabled park managers to keep the park gates open for now.

However, while park entrance gates largely remain open, facilities have been aging, many to the point that they are no longer safe for the public to utilize. In the above mentioned report, EcoNorthwest identified over \$80 million in deferred maintenance needs in 22 of Oregon's county park systems (counties evaluated account for 88% of statewide population). Many of the projects identified in the report are required to meet basic health and safety needs, including potable water upgrades, sewage system repairs, and other infrastructure projects. Furthermore, a good majority of the projects are associated with revenue generating facilities that enable county parks systems to continue sustainable operations.

SB 331 will provide counties with an additional 15% of recreational vehicle licensing fees. This additional revenue is estimated to provide Oregon's 36 counties with roughly \$2.5 million more per year to tackle deferred projects and assist in funding the operations of your county parks systems. Without the passage of SB 331 counties will lose approximately \$800,000 of annual RV licensing fee revenues beginning July 1, 2015. This loss will devastate already distressed county park programs, resulting in drastic service level cuts. It is imperative that the additional funds allocated by SB 331 are received to maintain an acceptable service level to our customers and preserve the path to financial sustainability that county park programs have diligently pursued.

Counties need the support of your committee to continue providing safe, accessible, local outdoor recreation opportunities for our citizens. We strongly urge you to support SB 331.

Sincerely,

Steve Lambert
Oregon Parks Association, President