

LINN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



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Testimony of Commissioner Will Tucker
SB 331
Senate Committee on Rural Communities and Economic Development
February 14, 2013

Thank you Chair Roblan and Committee members for the opportunity to address this body.

As a 5th year Linn County Commissioner, and before that a 12 year Linn County Parks Commissioner and 14 years as a County Budget Committee member, I have seen my County go through many changes. We are on my third Park Plan in my time, and are struggling with funding most programs in the County. We, as a Board of Commissioners are dedicated to protecting special places, making affordable, safe outdoor recreational opportunities available, and to contributing to the public health, education and the economic vitality of rural communities.

Linn County Parks just 15 years ago was funded 70% by General Fund, less than 30% by User Fees and a small percentage from grants (depending upon the year) and RV Licensing Fees. We put in place a Park Plan to get the "day to day" operations out of the General Fund, and have over the years delivered on that plan. Last year Parks took no General Fund support and is again budgeted to break even this year. There is a small budgeted component of the total funding that is Grant related; Marine Board, State Parks County Opportunity Grants, RV Fees and others.

What has changed has been that my County's budget is under attack. At the same time support from the Federal Government and the State of Oregon has reduced and the requirement or pressure to deliver the programs has increased. The County's population continues to grow while our unemployment rate continues over 10%. We are under the same constraints as the State with PERS and health care costs. Our General Fund is hurting with personal property tax decreasing as paper plants are being torn down, lumber mills shutting down and other business closing; and on top of that the effect of real property value declines and new construction almost stopping.

Our revenues are not keeping up with costs.

The result is every General Fund dollar is scrutinized against our values to have Public Safety (last year laid off 17 Deputies), Public Health and other required county functions (we've cut by county staff by 14% (703 now 603) in recent years. The decision to spend a dollar in Parks is a decision to cut someplace else.

As part of our commitment to the local tax payers, Linn County Parks offers free day-use access to Parks and Waysides. We run a number of free boat ramps, some in support of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife others in our parks or with BLM. But our economic engine is the camping. We

offer 448 camping sites and 17 cabins on lakes, streams and reservoirs. To further leverage our staff and capital, we also run the US Forest Service campgrounds (82 more camp sites not included in the formula plus 6 Adirondack style shelters) and day-use sites as their concessionaire in Linn County. We are continuing to plan Parks expansion as the Army Corps of Engineers plans on closing dispersed camping on their lands and we are working with one city on a joint development opportunity. We are working to develop a site on the valley floor to take advantage of proximity to I-5.

We need the funds from Oregon State Parks to combine with other sources to fund capacity growth and deferred capital projects. We use the combination of County Opportunity Grants, general funds to build capacity, and well as these RV funds. For example we are currently restoring a CCC picnic structure at Clear and for another example we need to replace the bathrooms at Lewis Creek both to comply with ADA and to replace a failing structure.

Why do I support the increase in the ratio of FR Licensing fees going to the Counties?

- Counties now having close to 50% of the RV spaces when looking at State Parks and the Counties (not including Federal and private sites)
- Counties are facing significant deferred maintenance that impact the overall perception of parks and recreation in Oregon,
- The current funding ratio of 65% to State Parks/35% to Counties sunsets back to 70/30 in 2014
- County Park Systems have no secure funding other than this small fund

The change is less than a 2.5% change in revenue for parks, yet means a lot to individual counties. In Linn County, it would take RV Licensing revenue from \$326,457 to \$466,661, a 43% increase.

Please DO NOT Change the formula for how the County Parks portion of the funds are distributed by Parks. The formula today is that 10% of the designated money is taken off the top to fund the County Parks Opportunity Grants. This is a great way to accumulate money and award significant funds to a specific County Park projects on a competitive basis. The remaining money is then divided among the counties, with 50% weighted to campsites owned, 20% by the number of RV Registrations and 30% by population.

Please support the County's as they work to deliver services to the citizens of Oregon and visitors to our great State. Please support SB 331.

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