



Natural Areas and Parks Department

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February 13, 2013

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

RE: Senate Bill 331, Public Hearing 2/14/2013, 3:00 p.m.

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the scores of local patrons and visitors who find renewal and family enrichment within Benton County's Natural Areas and Parks, we're grateful for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 331.

The system in Benton County is comprised of 15 parks and natural areas containing just under 1500 acres. The parks in the system are distributed throughout the County, yet many are conveniently located near the large population centers of Corvallis, North Albany and Philomath. There are only portions of two state parks in the County and these are located on Northeastern and Southeastern County borders.

Over the last few decades, County citizens and local elected officials have demonstrated extraordinary support for County Parks and Natural Areas, both in terms of visitation and financial commitment, but with the recent strain on public resources and the aging infrastructure within our system, we are in very serious need of additional stable funding to protect and rehabilitate park facilities and resources.

Our current backlog of Deferred Maintenance Projects represents an estimated total cost of \$750,000 with many of these backlogged projects associated with revenue generating facilities. Our Department must compete with every other County Department for very limited Capital Improvement dollars and we usually receive less than \$25,000 per biennium in general fund assistance toward capital projects. We typically leverage the capital funding we are provided as hard match funds to obtain grants.

Like all other County Park Departments statewide, Benton County has employed a variety of creative revenue generating tools to minimize our dependence on local general revenues. We collaborate extensively with partner agencies to produce efficiencies, constantly seek grant funding support and we're proud that recently we have been aided by formation of a local non-profit with a specific mission to provide support for local park projects. Unfortunately however, these revenue generating efforts still fall short of keeping pace with our deteriorating infrastructure and minimal staffing needs.

The 15% increase in RV revenues to be realized by Benton County as a result of the proposed legislation represents an annual gain of dedicated, stable revenues in the amount of just under \$30,000. This funding represents a critical opportunity to enhance our ability to preserve highly valued local public resources and facilities, and leverage outside grant resources to stretch the dollars that come our way.

On somewhat of a personal note, I'd also like to add that as a 27 year veteran in the field of public park and natural resource administration, most of those years as a member of the Oregon Parks Association, I've certainly experienced the typical peaks and valleys associated with public funding for parks, however after listening to my County Park colleagues around the state, it has become clear that the current level of funding challenges is indeed at an unprecedented level. This is especially discouraging in light of the currently well documented need to keep youth and the general public engaged and enriched by meaningful outdoor activity.

We urge your support of Senate Bill 331, and appreciate the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Jeff Powers, Director
Oregon Parks Association Board Member