

I am writing to give my perspectives on HB 2516. This bill would allow money from the Watershed Conservation Operating Fund and Watershed Conservation Grant Fund to be used for educating elementary school students on the protection and restoration of native fish, watersheds and ecosystems. My understanding is that this bill would channel OWEB funds to the Department of Education for development of a statewide outdoor school program.

Our experience shows that all sustainable (and therefore successful) environmental education programs in our area (Columbia River Gorge) have been grass-roots endeavors that started with virtually no outside funding or outside-mandated structure. Instead, these programs originated based on locally recognized need, and with assistance provided by local citizens, groups, agencies, and most important, watershed councils. The programs started in the local schools, were typically developed and marketed by one far seeing teacher, and eventually expanded at a measured and methodical pace using targeted local help and funding. Furthermore, we've observed that the programs have evolved into long-lasting institutions that do not rely on long-term outside funding. Many things are best done locally, and that's what watershed councils and their partners are all about.

Rather than creating and funding new top-down education programs, it makes sense to look at how existing community-based education programs can be adequately supported. OWEB's long-term investment strategy may be one place for this discussion to occur.

Thank you for your anticipated consideration during upcoming deliberations on HB 2516.

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