



Johnson Creek
Watershed Council

House Committee on Energy and the Environment
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem OR 97301

Re: Concerns about House Bill 2516 diverting funds from existing restoration, outreach and conservation education projects and programs

Dear Chairman Bailey and Committee Members:

The Johnson Creek Watershed Council (JCWC) supports the educational outcomes that HB 2516 is intended to promote. The creation of a statewide outdoor school program would have a great deal of value. I personally believe that as the Executive Director of JCWC, as the father of two boys who are just starting school, and as someone who has my own vivid memories of Outdoor School at Camp Collins thirty years ago. Outdoor School made a lasting impression on me.

My concern is that, as written, HB 2516 could divert significant funding away from existing education and restoration programs that already support many of the outcomes the bill promotes.

In addition to their ecological benefits, OWEB-funded restoration projects provide living classrooms that councils, districts, and their partners use to engage youth in place-based education and service learning programs. As an example, over the last five years, 700 high school students have participated in Johnson Creek Watershed Council's Youth Engaged service learning program for which we have received OWEB funding. These students have conducted water quality monitoring and macro invertebrate surveys at sites throughout Johnson Creek Watershed. They also have planted 5,500 native trees and remove 200 cubic yards of invasive weed at these sites, helping them toward ecological recovery. This is the kind of program that could be jeopardized as a potential unintended consequence of HB 2516.

Perhaps rather than trying to fund a new program, it would make sense to look at how existing community-based education programs can be better leveraged and even expanded. OWEB's long-term investment strategy may be one place for this discussion to occur.

There may also be alternative new revenue sources that can be used to create a state-wide outdoor school program without diverting funds from watershed restoration and related outreach programs. This was a possibility that I discussed last week with one of the backers of HB 2516. I was pleased to hear the willingness to seek alternative revenue sources than the Watershed Conservation Operating Fund and Watershed Conservation Grant Fund to support the creation of a state-wide outdoor school program.

To conclude, I appreciate and agree with the bill's commitment to conservation education for children, but I worry that HB 2516 could have serious unintended consequences for existing programs that are working and that our state needs.

Best Regards,

Matt Clark
Executive Director