

Josephine County, Oregon

Board of Commissioners: Cheryl Walker, K.O. Heck, Simon Hare



PARKS PROGRAM

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To: Honorable Representatives and Senators

Regarding: Senate Bill 1514, Distribution of Recreational Vehicle License Revenues

Dear Madams and Sirs;

Thank you for the opportunity to address a very important funding issue for a struggling Josephine County Parks Program. The purpose of this letter is to call on you to add your voice in supporting Senate Bill 1514.

As you are likely aware, similar legislation was submitted in the 2013 legislative session. While the legislation (SB 331) made it through the initial committee with overwhelming support, it unfortunately did not make it through the Ways and Means subcommittee. Instead, the committee attached a budget note to OPRD's 13/15 budget requiring the agency to work with counties through the Oregon Solutions Team. The goal of the process was to identify ways to aid struggling counties to provide the much needed local park experience that Oregonians so clearly treasure. At the request of the legislature, the Oregon Solutions process was completed in December of 2013 and as a result, LC 156 became SB 1514, which is being submitted with the full support of the OPRD, the Governor's office, and the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC), and the Oregon Parks Association (OPA). The bill is the fruition of a truly collaborative process in which increased dialogue has resulted in a thoughtful solution for all Oregonians!

Today's financial shortfalls are devastating in Josephine County, and a great deal of our economic health depends on tourist dollars. As you may know, Josephine County is located in one of the most beautiful settings in Oregon. The Rogue River is the sixth (6th) busiest waterway in Oregon and Josephine County Parks have 80% of public access to the Rogue River for fishing, boating, floating, swimming and other activities that entice visitors to enjoy this special place. It is also a known fact that a healthy park system is an economic benefit to any community. Our Indian Mary boat ramp was awarded a National Award in 2012 by a vote of the combined 50 states Marine Boards. Josephine County Parks received an award from the Oregon State Marine Board for Outstanding Boating Facilities Maintenance for the years 2009-2011.

Josephine County Parks fill a niche that is not met by Oregon State Parks. Many of our out-of-town visitors think our parks are state parks because they are in such amazing settings and because we strive to provide excellence and high quality outdoor recreational experiences. Our goal is to keep our parks worthy of their natural settings. To do so requires adequate funding; something we have not had for many years. Because of the loss of O&C monies, Josephine County Parks do not receive any money from the general fund, making them dependent on fees and grants. In fact, since the 1980's the Parks Program has gone from having 27 FTEs to 6 FTEs, with a growing population and older parks infrastructures to maintain. Should we attain our goal of a 45-55 split with OPRD, which is not only fair but is long overdue, our Parks Program will see an increase in revenue of approximately \$75,000. There is so much we could do with that revenue to improve our parks.

Thank you for your consideration of this truly important and fair Senate Bill. It is our sincere hope that all of you support counties in their quest to help keep our county parks beautiful and our communities viable through maintaining the valuable gems of our beautiful state, our county parks.

Sincerely Yours,

Doreen Ferguson
Parks Program Manager