



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

March 4, 2015

To: Senator Richard Devlin and Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chairs
Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Waysandmeans.NaturalResourcesSub@state.or.us

Re: SB 5528, Parks and Recreation Department Budget - Comments

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. In 1999, the League adopted a comprehensive position on parks, recognizing *“that a parks system is an appropriate function of state government”* and should *“Acquire, protect and preserve natural, scenic, cultural, historic and wildlife sites and other resources.”* We called for a periodically updated long-range strategic plan giving high priority to *“Preservation and maintenance of existing parks; Protection and expansion of public access to ocean beaches; Acquisition of additional park resources; Provision of campground facilities and day-use areas; and Protection of scenic waterways.”*

With that in mind, we offer the following comments:

The Oregon Parks and Recreation system is a crown jewel of Oregon’s state government. Oregonians treasure their varied natural landscape across all corners of our state. Our parks system assures that our children and grandchildren will be able to enjoy them as well. So we have concerns related to the divestment of some state properties. We recognize a business model where some properties might not provide a return on investment; however, it is important to remember that these properties may provide a value not related to any business model. There may be small properties that provide access to yet another asset or that exist to provide an unimpeded view of some spectacular place. So any divestment must be viewed with a larger lens than only one related to a traditional business model.

Another point to be made regarding divestment is to know how the property came to become state parks property. Was it gifted under the expectation that it would be a state park property? Was it purchased with some federal grant or foundation dollars, again with restrictions as to its use and ability to be sold? Transferring to a local entity might be allowed under some of these restrictions, but not all local jurisdictions have the same level of commitment to their parks systems. So protecting that land for parks—no matter which entity owns it—is critical to the League.

We are concerned by the limited dollars set aside under this budget for acquisition of new properties. Like any real estate deal, the agency needs to have the ability to take advantage of a purchase opportunity when an important property becomes available. So having the funding flexibility to be able to acquire a new property is important. The League worked with others during the 2007 session to add dollars to the agency budget to work towards meeting their KPM of parks per 1,000 population. We are proud of the purchases that have ensued as a result of that effort.

The League has consistently encouraged increased collaboration among our natural resource agencies related to day use permits. As we have supported camping fees being in line with the market, we also

oppose any increase in day use permits. It is an important public value that ALL Oregonians have access to these special places.

By supporting state parks around the state, we believe that local economies benefit. State parks are magnets and users stop to dine, to shop for food or local souvenirs (like kites!). Providing a nexus between local educational groups and our state parks is yet another link that should be encouraged.

We believe that it is appropriate for the agency to consider demographic and activity changes when planning for the future. But it is also important not to take one economic downturn as a view of the future. Baby boomers still have another 20 years to recreate and rv camping will be part of that activity. However, millennials may well want different experiences, so constantly considering the next market is appropriate.

The League believes that the state scenic waterways program is important, both to protection of special sections of Oregon's rivers and also to recognizing that passive river recreation is yet another movement occurring in Oregon. Two of our local leagues supported the designation of sections of the Molalla and the Chetco as scenic rivers. We are disappointed in the Commission's lack of clear action on these two proposals—the first in MANY years. We would expect the agency to continue to review and consider new waterways per the requirement under state law.

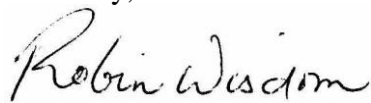
We are concerned about the effects of climate change on our parks properties. We know that erosion of our beaches and shorelines are increasing. Lack of water in some parks may be an issue. But there can be positives. Scientists have shared that they are seeing spring arrive a week ahead of time each of the last three decades. So the agency needs to consider its seasonal openings and adjust to meet this new reality.

When the bill passed in 2013 to redistribute rv registration fees between the state and counties, there was a discussion regarding possible agreements related to efficiency of management and not just trading parks properties. Although we understand there are now "regional recreation coalitions", it is unclear that the operational functions, marketing or management of properties promise has been met.

Lastly, we want to bring up a concern related to the agreement between the agency and the Oregon State Parks Foundation. That agreement calls for a 25% administration fee for donations received. The general public might not realize that, if they donate to this foundation, 25% of their monies will be kept by the Foundation. We'd like to encourage that any new agreement revisit that fee allocation.

League members, like all Oregonians, treasure our Oregon Parks. We hope to work with you and others to continue to keep it one of Oregon's gems.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom
President



Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

Cc: Lisa Van Lannen, OPRD Director