

March 4, 2015

Senator Richard Devlin and Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chairs
Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: SB 5528 – Oregon Parks & Recreation Department Budget

Co-Chairs Devlin and Rayfield and Members of the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 5528, the proposed budget for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

The Nature Conservancy in Oregon has a long history of partnership with and support for the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Our missions intersect in many ways as TNC seeks to “conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends” and OPRD works to “provide and protect outstanding natural, scenic, cultural, historic and recreational sites for the enjoyment and education of present and future generations”.

A robust, geographically diverse and accessible park system is a foundational element of a thriving, healthy Oregon and our future success as a state. Stewardship and a respect for natural resources are deeply embedded in the Oregon psyche and those values have served us well over time. We have spectacular pristine natural areas, a thriving agricultural industry and exceptional, hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities. We may struggle to keep all those interests in balance at times, but if we rise above those internecine squabbles and take an aerial view, it is clear that, in comparison to other states, we have done a pretty good job of protecting our natural resources and the multiple benefits those resources provide. However, if we fail to maintain and cultivate a stewardship ethic among our expanding, increasingly urbanized and increasingly screen-obsessed population, we risk losing part of what makes Oregon special. Which brings us back to the critical nature of a well-developed park system: ***We have to provide people of all ages and backgrounds with access to outdoor experiences that allow them to come to a personal, tangible understanding of the value of Oregon’s natural bounty and develop their own brand of stewardship through which they can act to protect the Oregon we all know and love.***

In past biennia we have expressed support for OPRD’s acquisition program and our belief that it is critical to the department’s ability to achieve its mission. We continue to support the acquisition program and would like to see it funded at a level that allows the department to be ready to take advantage of opportunities to procure strategically important sites. The 2015-17 budget for acquisition is austere and, frankly, may not meet that “readiness” standard. However, we understand the factors that led to this budget and the department’s desire to take a “pause” in new park development to allow some breathing space to reflect and plan. And we understand the importance of maintaining investment in direct services that ensure excellent visitor experiences. So, we take a leap of faith in supporting this budget and hope that, if an outstanding, strategically important site becomes available, OPRD will be able to bring together a community of

supporters and draw upon the collective resources of local, state, federal and private partners to secure that site.

In closing, though this is not a perfect budget, we support the department in its effort to maintain its existing level of high quality service while it plans the best way to organize and invest to meet the challenge of connecting a growing and changing population of Oregonians to the outdoors.

Amanda Rich
Director of State Government Relations
The Nature Conservancy in Oregon
arich@tnc.org

The Nature Conservancy is the world's leading conservation organization, working in all 50 United States and 35 countries across the globe. In Oregon, with the support of 32,000 members, we own 44 preserves and have helped protect more than 511,000 acres of critical habitat since our chapter began in 1961. We are guided by innovative science and thrive because of effective partnerships. **We bring people together to find solutions that protect nature and promote the social and economic vitality of the communities in which we work.** To learn more, please visit us at [Nature.org/Oregon](https://www.nature.org/Oregon).