



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

April 9, 2015

To: House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water
Representative Brian Clem, Chair
Members of the Committee
ian.davidson@state.or.us

Re: HB 3417, Regional Solutions Regional Advisory Committee Meetings (RACs) Public Access - SUPPORT

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League believes that citizen access to public meetings and the ability for citizens to provide meaningful input into decisions about the expenditure of state funds and direction of state staff is embedded in Oregon's DNA.

When HB 4015 (2014) was passed last year, the League participated in the development of that bill to assure such public access was part of the process for these newly created regional groups. We expressed concern at the time related to the makeup of these RACs—too few members for the broad geographic area and limited time for the public—even local elected officials—to respond to agenda items. HB 3417 is an attempt to begin to provide that greater notification.

To be clear, the League believes the concept of multiple agencies working together on projects of mutual interest and responsibility is a good thing. That's the Regional Solutions Teams. We were, however, concerned that natural resource agency field staff were being asked to do more without additional support. So we have advocated for additional field staff during the 2013 budget development for these agencies to assure they can competently provide thoughtful input and still do the day to day work that brought them to the field initially. We do still have a concern that these staff are sometimes placed in the position of advocate for a project that needs a permit for which they are the reviewer.

Separately, the RACs are a select group of Governor-appointed persons who, through the current budget process, have been given the opportunity to "spend" up to \$2 million for each of the 11 regions without specific legislative oversight. The meetings where these funding recommendations are decided currently only have a 7-day notice to a select few who know enough to sign up on a website. Even before that decision is the one where "regional priorities" are selected. Those meetings need broader public input as well.

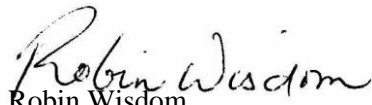
The League believes that this access should be a concern not only for private citizens, but for the business community and other local government jurisdictions, as well as the legislature. The truth is that often "those who sit at the table get to eat". So, with only one county

commissioner, it's unclear if the other counties in the region get equal access to these decisions. That is even more true about cities, since there are even more cities within each region. And only one business person is appointed, although there are a diverse set of business interests in each region, each with their own set of financial needs.

The League has tried to notify our members of the opportunity to at least monitor these meetings, but the lack of notice time discourages anyone needing to travel. Some RACs offer a telephone call-in opportunity, but that is not a regular practice and doesn't always work well. We encourage you to review the map of the 11 regions (website is listed below) and consider if you would be able to attend should a meeting be held in one end of a region?

We ask that you support HB 3417 and increase the opportunity for participation in these meetings, where state money and staff are "allocated".

Sincerely,


Robin Wisdom
President


Peggy Lynch
Natural Resources Coordinator

<http://www.oregon.gov/gov/admin/regional-solutions/Pages/about.aspx>

cc: Annette Liebe, Director Regional Solutions Program
Rep. Ken Helm
Rep. Val Hoyle, Sponsors