

March 30, 2017

To: House Committee on Economic Development and Trade

Chair, the Honorable Ann Lininger
Vice-Chair, the Honorable Pam Marsh
Vice-Chair, the Honorable David Brock Smith
The Honorable Brian Clem
The Honorable David Gomberg
The Honorable Ken Helm
The Honorable Rick Lewis
The Honorable Bill Post
The Honorable E. Werner Reschke

Re: Support for HB 3350

Elevating the Importance of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon

The Oregon conservation and recreation organizations listed below are writing to express our support for HB 3350 which creates an Office of Outdoor Recreation within the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department as well as an Advisory Council and Fund.

Each of our organizations are an integral part of Oregon's rapidly growing outdoor recreation economy. We employ many full-time staff who work to protect our public lands. Our employees and volunteers lead hikes and other recreation activities throughout Oregon. We teach thousands of people each year how to protect our wild places. The collective impact of our education programs plays an important part in protecting Oregon's outdoor recreation experiences.

High-quality outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands contribute significantly to the quality of life for Oregonians and they help attract new businesses and residents to Oregon. It's no surprise that Bend, Hood River and other communities near our National Forests are growing quickly. Business owners who enjoy hiking, mountain biking, backpacking, kayaking, climbing, skiing and other activities are moving to Oregon because they can enjoy bountiful recreation opportunities at the end of the work day. They use Oregon's recreation assets as a tool to recruit high-quality employees. This adds up to a significant economic driver in communities that are gateways to our federal and state lands.

We know that a sustainable outdoor recreation future for Oregon will need to have a solid trail infrastructure connecting people to our public lands. Without state and federal-level support for the maintenance and development of many signature trail systems throughout the state we will continue to see increased pressure on public lands. An Office of Outdoor Recreation should work quickly to develop a plan to tackle our lagging trail infrastructure and coordinate this effort across jurisdictions and sectors.

As conservation and recreation organizations we feel that recreation infrastructure maintenance and development should be at the forefront of debates about public lands. Too often, we hear people talk about the transfer of public lands as a way to

balance our budget but with little regard for Oregon's recreation assets. We encourage this new outdoor recreation office to take the lead in elevating the dialogue around the diverse uses of our public lands to ensure they are managed in a sustainable and equitable way.

We also see the benefits of convening an outdoor recreation advisory council so that community leaders can provide feedback on state-wide outdoor recreation initiatives. For example, we consistently work to educate our members and the general public in how to protect our public lands. We appreciate the efforts of our state and federal agencies to do the same but we feel that a coordinated effort to communicate the importance of public lands through the lens of responsible recreation will benefit all Oregonians.

Finally, we understand the importance of collaboration with agencies like Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in restoring our favorite recreation areas and their degraded habitats. Our diverse ecosystems provide a wonderland of discovery but can experience real impacts from unmanaged recreation. To bridge the gap and move forward on these issues we think HB 3350's Outdoor Recreation Fund and the implementation of a long-term vision to protect our recreation assets will lead to a healthier Oregon with a rich legacy conserved for future generations.

We encourage you to support HB 3350 to create an Office of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon and we pledge to work with you in support of this effort.

Sincerely,

Tom Kloster
President
Trailkeepers of Oregon

Rhett Lawrence
Sierra Club – Oregon Chapter
Conservation Director

George Milne
President
Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs

Russ Plaeger
Restoration Coordinator
Bark

Sean Stevens
Oregon Wild
Executive Director

Marlies Wierenga
WildEarth Guardians
PNW Conservation Manager