



Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

House Bill 3350 Testimony

April 3, 2017

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) is neutral on House Bill 3350, but welcomes this opportunity to testify about the relationship between this proposed statute and the mission and work of the agency.

OPRD has a wide mission, spanning state parks, scenic waterways, management of the ocean shore, and historic preservation. It began life in 1922 as a small group within the Highway Commission, bearing responsibility for creating a system of restful waysides and special places capturing some of Oregon's most iconic and beautiful landscapes. Oregon's appetite for family-friendly outdoor adventure grew through the 50s and 60s, and the state park system blossomed. In the 70s and 80s, outdoor recreation matured and evolved into a powerful component of Oregon's identity, and OPRD's role grew with it, transcending state parks themselves. The 1965 federal Land and Water Conservation Act, and landmark state laws like the 1967 beach bill and 1970 scenic waterway act, helped propel outdoor recreation from enjoyable pastime toward its future as a major driver of community well-being and contributor to local economic strength.

In 1989, the state park division separated from the Oregon Department of Transportation and stood on its own as a full-fledged department. A band of legislators and motivated citizens took the opportunity to establish a set of high-minded goals for the state related to outdoor recreation (ORS 390.010), building to this statement:

"It shall be the policy of the State of Oregon to supply those outdoor recreation areas, facilities and opportunities which are clearly the responsibility of the state in meeting growing needs; and to encourage all agencies of government, voluntary and commercial organizations, citizen recreation groups and others to work cooperatively and in a coordinated manner to assist in meeting total recreation needs through exercise of their appropriate responsibilities."

Since the 60s, and especially since emerging as its own agency in the 90s, the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has used community grants, statewide recreation planning, and leadership on advisory councils to become an advocate for all Oregon outdoor recreation, not just the state-managed park system. In the last 10+ years, the department has been shifting to focus on:

- Better collaboration with the travel and tourism industry.
- More productive relationships with outdoor recreation-related businesses.
- Increasing support for close-to-home recreation, especially for youth and traditionally underserved populations.

In just the last 10 years, and especially in the last two, the department has ramped up work to more deeply understand changes to Oregon’s social landscape. While more people have been taking advantage of outdoor recreation opportunities than ever—and enjoying the healthful, family-building, economy-enriching results—the benefits are not evenly spread among different communities and to people from every demographic background. Much more work needs to be done to design and manage outdoor recreation experiences so they:

- Are accessible and attractive to all Oregonians, especially youth.
- Draw people from urban to rural areas.
- Become sustainable, delivering long-term benefits to communities without wearing out either rural infrastructure or the natural resources upon which recreation depends.

Beyond better management, delivering experiences more broadly, and serving rural communities, the department also sees a need to keep local, state, and federal elected officials and other policymakers are fully informed of the effects laws and rules have on encouraging or discouraging outdoor recreation.

We understand it will take a well-coordinated effort between recreation managers, tourism networks, and the outdoor industry “encourage all agencies of government, voluntary and commercial organizations, citizen recreation groups and others to work cooperatively and in a coordinated manner to assist in meeting total recreation needs.”