

May 2, 2017

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee:

The Coalition for the Deschutes supports HB 2027-A, the bill that provides significant and important protection to an ecologically sensitive stretch of the Deschutes Scenic Waterway in and adjacent to Bend.

The Coalition is a 501(c)3 organization focused on advocacy and engagement on behalf of the upper Deschutes River, a river whose flow, riparian areas and uplands already are overworked and increasingly stressed.

Rapid growth has significantly impinged on important wildlife corridors and habitat areas in and around the community of Bend. Allowing a proposed pedestrian/bicycle bridge in this portion of a state-designated Scenic Waterway significantly diminishes the integrity of a remaining and very important wildlife corridor.

Other area corridors and habitat 'islands' now are increasingly crisscrossed by numerous trails, roads and highways. This bill prevents crisscrossing and protects a critical remnant.

The consequences of unfettered access into important wildlife habitat are uncontested. Analyses of wildlife and habitat disturbance issues are an essential planning element for land and resource managers. Further, disturbance mitigation is increasingly addressed in agency management plans.

For example, the management plan for the soon-to-be-completed Bend Parks and Recreation District's 184-acre Riley Ranch Nature Reserve Park abutting the Deschutes River just north of town provides: that no dogs be allowed in the new park (to protect the health and safety of wildlife); that no bikes be allowed (to protect park trails and eliminate wildlife stress); and that development and access to riparian areas be strictly limited.

The Coalition believes that building a pedestrian/bicycle bridge across this Scenic Waterway threatens wildlife by segmenting movement corridors and degrading extremely important wildlife habitat.

In effect, the pedestrian/bicycle bridge sought by the Bend Parks and Recreation District will enable the same types of degradation the Parks District says it wants to protect in its new park along the same river north of town.

In this instance, the trade offs between recreation access and wildlife protection in this Scenic

Waterway are unacceptable. The Coalition stands with members of the Oregon House who voted unanimously for this bill.

As the Oregon House has demonstrated and other groups and individuals have testified, the values embodied in the Scenic Waterways concept are too important to ignore.

Sincerely,

Coalition for the Deschutes Board of Directors:

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Cc: Rep. Gene Whisnant, Rep. Knute Buehler, Sen. Tim Knopp