

Senator Micheal Dembrow
Chair, Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee
900 Court St. NE, S-407
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Senator Dembrow:

I am writing to you today to ask for your support of HB 2027. I am assuming that you are receiving a multitude of letters on this proposed legislation and have been presented with a wide range of data showing both support and opposition. The Bend Bulletin and Source Weekly have both covered the issue extensively, and in my opinion have grossly mischaracterized or ignored the real issues at stake. The issue at stake is the continued protection of the Upper Deschutes Scenic Waterway which cannot be protected without HB 2027.

As you are likely aware, in 2016 Bend Parks and Recreation Department (“BPRD”) petitioned the Oregon State Parks Commission to amend the language in the rules governing a specific section of the State Scenic Waterway on the upper Deschutes River, specifically asking for the removal of language prohibiting the construction of bridges in this section of river. The State denied the request from BPRD, but formed an advisory committee the Upper Deschutes Advisory Group (“UDAG”) to review all of the rules governing this one mile stretch of river and to make recommendations to the State Parks Commission on how this river segment should be treated since its original designation. The committee (and to some limited extent the public) was asked to address a few fundamental questions about the Scenic Waterway:

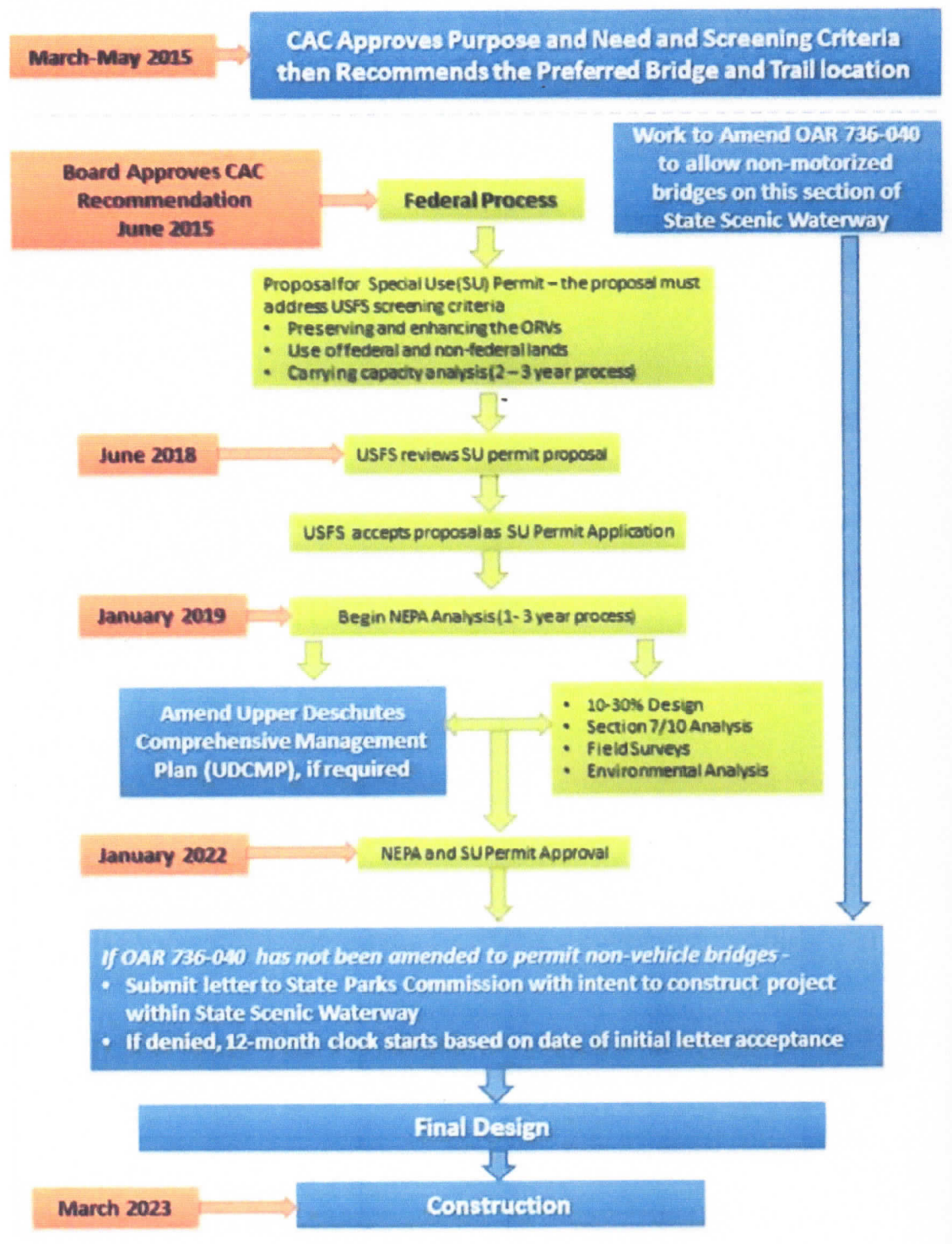
1. Since the waterway rules were drafted more than 20 years ago, are they still helpful and relevant?
2. Do they serve community and state scenic waterway needs well?

The draft report from UDAG was just made available, and it is abundantly clear that a vast majority of the community and the stakeholders involved in the UDAG process overwhelmingly agree that building a bridge in this section of protected waterway would be a mistake.

The State Scenic Waterway needs our protection and advocacy now more than ever. Bend’s population and tourist visits since the Scenic Waterway designation in 1988 have exploded. The natural areas, that are part of what make Bend such a special place, are becoming fewer and fewer. Critical fish and wildlife habitat close to town is almost non-existent. We cannot afford to lose this natural riparian habitat.

Bend’s robust city trail system and adjacent USFS trail system provide ample access for nearby recreation. BPRD often mentions that building a bridge is necessary to connect the robust city trail system to the USFS trail system to the south. However, this connectivity already exists. Why would we as a state that prides itself on environmental stewardship, sacrifice one of our few remaining protected wild areas to simply allow for easier trail access to a small portion of the population who can access these same trails via an existing trail network?

BPRD has made clear, as evidenced from the attached process timeline, copied here from BPRD's website, that they will circumvent the ban on bridge construction in the Scenic Waterway, if denied by the State.

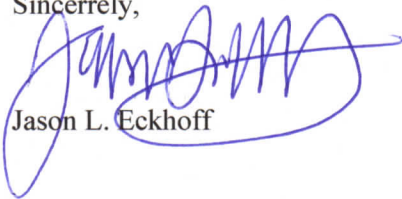


The blue path in the above flow-chart clearly shows BPRD's intent to move forward with developing a bridge in the Scenic Waterway by use of a loophole in the current rules. BPRD has suggested that they will use this loophole by submitting a letter to the State Parks Commission with the intent to construct the project within State Scenic Waterway and that after 12-months of such notice, according to the current rules governing Scenic Waterways, BPRD can construct their bridge despite the rules prohibiting it. In my view, such a tactic is a clear assault on the Scenic Waterway and the rules that protect it.

HB 2027 is critical to protecting our Scenic Waterway. This is not a bill that "Stops the Completion of the Deschutes River Trail" as headlined in the local papers. This is a bill about protecting our Scenic Waterway which has benefitted from these protections since established in 1988 and deserves these protections going forward.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerrely,



Jason L. Eckhoff