



May 9, 2017

Chair Dembrow and Honorable Members of the Oregon Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources,

The Board of Directors for the Bend Park and Recreation District (the District) opposes House Bill 2027-A, and we strongly believe it should not advance in the legislative process. This bill would take decision-making away from the community and would end decades of effort connecting the Deschutes River Trail. We want to continue a community discussion that engages all interests in consideration of a pedestrian bridge over the Deschutes River.

Voters in Bend approved a bond-funded project in 2012 to connect the communities of Tumalo and Sunriver via the Deschutes River Trail. In a spring 2017 survey, when asked what the District could do to improve parks and trails, 72% of respondents were supportive of completing a footbridge crossing on the south boundary of Bend. 14% were unsupportive. The small minority who oppose a project should be part of the community conversation but not allowed to circumvent rulemaking.

HB 2027-A does not strengthen the Oregon Scenic Waterway program. The area is now within the urban growth boundary and residential development has already altered migration patterns for wildlife. Far from a pristine wildlife area as suggested by some, urbanization and residential development, including dense subdivisions and large homes immediately adjacent to this area (that apparently satisfy the Scenic Waterway rules), have developed during the 20 years since the Scenic Waterway was established. With appropriate planning and design, this area will remain special like the rest of the Deschutes River Trail and should be taken care of for generations ahead. Bend Park and Recreation District has a demonstrated record of thoughtfully designed, carefully maintained and ecologically compatible trails and footbridges.

The community has envisioned connecting the Deschutes River Trail to the U.S. Forest Service land for decades, including in the Bend Park and Recreation District's Trail Plan, the City of Bend's Transportation System Plan, and the Deschutes River Trail Action Plan. That vision has been carried through with the implementation of community development codes that allow transportation infrastructure to be located within riparian area as a way to encourage construction of trails. Each and every one of those visioning and implementation processes included heavy community feedback and participation.

Central Oregon is fortunate to have hundreds of miles of public trails in the area; however, local trails in town connect neighbors and open opportunities for non-motorized transportation. Health, community, and environmental stewardship are among the significant public benefits of the Deschutes River Trail.

The District is committed to public engagement and will continue to seek community involvement and address concerns if a project is possible in the future. We have acted in coordination with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department specifically to facilitate a community discussion about the values our community holds for this scenic waterway.

Our community should have a discussion about the best way to meet the community wide interests with a trail access and connections. We are committed to this value and welcome the opportunity to learn more directly from those who differ in their viewpoints about this access. If this bill passes, it will preempt that discussion, implement the will of a small special interest, and abandon decades of planning for trail connections that improve access to recreation and the environment in one of Oregon's fastest growing cities.

Passage of this bill would also open a new, troubling precedent for other communities to legislate outside the rulemaking process, a process that has worked since the 1990s.

Just like the Oregon Coast, the Deschutes River Trail should be accessible by the general public. Please don't allow our river to have this key stretch gated off from public access and posted with no trespassing signs. This beloved reach of the river is a priority for the large majority of residents and deserves to have a principled discussion about its future. We respectfully request that you oppose this bill.

Respectfully,

Ted Schoenborn, Chair, Board of Directors, Bend Park and Recreation District

Nathan Hovekamp, Vice Chair

Craig Chenoweth, Director

Ellen Grover, Director

Brady Fuller, Director