

May 9, 2017

To: Oregon Senate

RE: Yes on HB2027

I am not a riverside homeowner in Bend, but I use the Deschutes River Trail system and have for many years. The proposed wilderness area bridge that the Bend Parks Department has been planning “since the nineteen eighties” would duplicate an existing and highly used bridge that is within walking distance of the proposed bridge! It would bring hordes into a pristine canyon that is the beginning of the wild and scenic area that leads upriver to the headwaters. This would lead to the exact same high level of environmental degradation that we see on the Farewell Bend Trail that the parks department is wanting to extend into the pristine area. (Yes, there are homes far above, but those folks won’t be scaling cliffs to get to it this proposed trail and bridge.)

NO GAP exists in this part of trail: Indeed, the Parks department claims to be filling a “gap” in the trail to Sunriver, but in fact, trail users going from Farewell Bend Park at the south end of Bend out to Sunriver already have a complete trail. The current, recently improved trail simply skirts this wild and scenic, inaccessible gorge area, taking users up above the river gorge. Sure, one must ride or walk up a one block long hill, on a sidewalk along Reed Market Road to reconnect, but so what? Much of the existing trail to Sunriver leaves the riverside, ascends steeply up to the top of rim rocks, and later returns to the river. Once you are out of Bend, the river trail is no longer the flat, stroller friendly trail that we see at the south end of Bend.

Most Bendites will never go all the way to Sunriver, a fourteen mile journey with many hills and challenges. Those who want to, like my husband, already do just fine with the existing trail up Reed Market and past Mt. Bachelor village.

Therefore, the people capable of going for more than a walk from Bend will not be using much beyond this pristine canyon currently not “served” by a trail. We do not need to be in this particular gorge, with our off leash dogs and strollers and dropped garbage. We do not need this loophole for the Parks Department, who seems tone deaf. Objections to this bridge are wide spread and are not just a bunch of NIMBYS from people living far above the river in this area. Most of us are too busy to write letters like this. If you are not convinced, do a credible survey after the facts are presented, such as the fact that the trail exists now. Lots of newspaper readers who don’t hike or bike it have no idea.

City trail has many gaps: There are many gaps in our shoreline trail right here in town. We could use more bridges in town. We could all walk many more places with proper urban trails. We don’t need to be encouraging folks to all drive to the south end of Bend, park, and then see this “new” gorge. How is that helpful? To use the trail in Bend, most people have to drive to a park because of the large in-town gaps in the trail. What we need is the city gaps filled! Can you imagine the beauty of being able to walk riverside through Bend?

Environmental cost: Habitat and extreme shore line degradation seen on the Farewell Bend trail today is caused by very heavy use: each month, thousands of people and their off-leash dogs use this 1.5 mile length, cross on the footbridge, and return to the park. So very many people leave the trail to get down to the river, trampling bushes and grasses that hold the bank in place, and destroying nests and eggs of wildlife as their dogs eagerly “flush” the wildlife for their grinning owners. If you ask folks, they

believe their dog/dogs are the only ones engaging in this “fun” activity, but if you visit the area in summer you will see this destruction every ten yards or so for most of the 1.5 mile length! There is a leash law and there is a large, off leash and fenced dog park a few hundred yards downriver, with safe access into the river for dogs, but people believe their pets need personal freedom and are not hurting much. One dog, perhaps not, but whatever the number is, it is definitely problematic. This pristine gorge, the beginning segment of safety for the wildlife we have destroyed in Bend, does not need us. We do not need this additional trail or bridge.

Why a bridge? And if we do decide it is so vital to be in this pristine gorge, why a bridge? The trail from Bend to Sunriver is on the west side of the river, except for the 1.5 mile length at Farewell Bend Park, where it is a loop on both sides of the river. The so called “gap” (at river’s edge) is on the west side of the river, so if this wild area really needs thousands of Bendites and their dogs and strollers using it, why not continue the existing west side trail? Why continue this trail on the east side for relatively short distance and then need an expensive bridge to return to the rest of the existing trail to Sunriver? I’m betting the Parks department does not believe it will win eminent domain on the west side, but will on the east in order to secure the riverside property required. All to despoil a protected gorge.

We have learned much as a society since the eighties, when this independent parks department first planned a continuous trail from Tumalo State Park, through Bend, to Sunriver. There is a trail that is a cyclists dream already. If that hill on Reed Market Road is too hard, perhaps our Parks department can put in a tow rope or other novel pedestrian assist. After all, they spent 10 million to “build” the river into a whitewater park so a few dozen tourists can whack whatever fish are still alive in this sadly pressured river. The Park department uses this as their reason: it was planned for decades. Well, Bend had new needs and a better understanding of our environment. And our wildlife needs us to look out for them. Blasting rocks and bringing in equipment to build this trail also seems a travesty to many of us.

Please ban bridges in our Wild and Scenic areas. Vote yes on HB2027.

Thank you.

Maureen Sempert

Bend Oregon