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Executive Director
Bend Park and Recreation District
HB2027A - Testimony
May 10, 2017

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

Thank you for taking the time today to listen to testimony in favor of and opposition to HB 2027. I sit as staff support at our Board table and watch our Board make difficult decisions. While I can't fully comprehend the position you are in I can appreciate the work you do, so thank you.

My role with Bend Park and Recreation District is to carry out the direction of our Board. As a Special District our Board of Directors are elected and represent the citizens of the District. Through their leadership I follow the plans and vision that has been provided to me. One decades'-long vision is to fully connect the Deschutes River Trail, opening easy access to a trail system that brings great value to the community. This vision has been memorialized in the City of Bend Transportation System Plan, The Deschutes County Transportation Plan, the Deschutes River Trail Action Plan and our own Bend Park and Recreation District's Trails Master Plan.

Trail development can be contentious. It often times brings trail users within proximity to residential neighborhoods causing concern for some residents. But trails also have many benefits. They bring healthy recreation and transportation to communities, allowing people of all ages to walk, bike and commune with nature. Trails function as viable transportation corridors linking people to schools, employment, recreation and to each other. In Bend and across Oregon, trails are an important part of the City and County transportation plans. Trails are an important part of Smart Growth communities that increase livability and sustainability. The trail segment we are talking about here today is no different.

Trails also add to the economic vitality of a community. In Bend the integrated trail system and local, close-to-home recreation opportunities are primary drivers to attracting businesses and people who want to live in Bend.

Following State Statutes and Administrative Rules

Bend Park and Recreation District is fully committed to the processes put in place by Statute. While the Oregon Scenic Waterways program was approved by voters across Oregon, the OARs are administered by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. The bridge rule is embedded in the OAR and not in legislation. We have worked closely with Oregon State Park on a process they have prescribed to consider removal of the no-bridge rule and are committed to continuing to do so. We contend that the process is now and should continue to be regulatory and not legislative. This is NOT a loophole, but the process established by the legislature for the entire state.

Funding

This project is fully funded and is identified in the District's Capital Improvement Plan. While the project will take years to complete, the Board has been dedicated to assuring the funding is in place to complete the project.

Serving the Community

This project is a strongly held community desire. As a tool in updating the District's Comprehensive Plan, a statistically valid survey conducted in March and April of this year by ETC Institute found that the citizens of Bend favor a possible bridge 5:1. 72% of respondents either favor or strongly favor the bridge while only 14 percent oppose or strongly oppose the bridge. The survey has a confidence level of 95%. ETC Institute is a well-respected research firm that has completed research projects for clients in 49 states. This includes thousands of surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder meetings.

Voter Approved Project

In November 2012, the District took to the voters a bond package that included four projects: land acquisition, the Pavilion Ice Rink, the Bend Whitewater Park, and the completion of the Deschutes River Trail. The projects were widely publicized by a campaign committee and information material was mailed to every resident in Bend. The completion of the Deschutes River Trail was the flagship project. The voters of Bend approved the bond.

Environmental Stewardship

As the largest landowner of riverfront property in Bend, we dedicate many resources to riverfront habitat including working with the Upper Deschutes Watershed Council to rehabilitate riparian areas and to establish new wetlands. We rebuilt the bank vegetation at First Street Rapids, created fish passage at the old Colorado Dam, now the Bend Whitewater Park, and through the bond program purchased over two miles of riverfront property for the Riley Ranch Nature Preserve.

Given the significance of this project to the Bend community and to our visitors, I urge you to allow us to see this project through. Once completed, it will be seen as a great community asset just like other contentious projects that have crossed the river, namely the Bill Healy Bridge or the south canyon pedestrian bridge. Today these facilities are not seen as a detriment to the river, but rather as very important links to our community.