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Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Environment & Natural Resources Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Oregon Wild and our 20,000 supporters and members in regard to the Deschutes River State Scenic Waterway and House Bill 2027-A. Oregon Wild supports HB 2027-A and encourages passage of the bill.

We fully support the State Scenic Waterway program and see this legislation as both clarifying and solidifying protections for the Deschutes River State Scenic Waterway. The State Scenic Waterways program was approved by Oregon voters by a 2 to 1 margin via ballot initiative in 1970 and has been instrumental in protecting Oregon's treasured rivers for several decades. Given the success of this measure, we are concerned about potential changes to the rules regarding the Deschutes River State Scenic Waterway.

Our concerns are twofold. First, we are concerned with the precedent of altering rules that have governed protections of our rivers for decades. These changes can often be well-intentioned, but they can have the unintended consequence of watering down protections for all State Scenic Waterways and opening the floodgates to make amendments to the rules a regular occurrence.

Our second concern is more specific to the Deschutes River State Scenic Waterway itself. On behalf of Oregon Wild, I serve on the Deschutes Forest Collaborative, Deschutes Trails Collaborative, and the Deschutes Provincial Advisory Committee. All three of these groups have identified concerns with the impacts that recreation is having on wildlife on the Deschutes National Forest. Most recently we have been looking at disturbance analysis from both roads and trails. It is clear that some important public values on the Deschutes National Forest are suffering from the impacts of intensive recreation. In particular disturbance to wildlife is increasingly a problem.

We fear the potential rule change to allow a bridge over the Deschutes River State Scenic Waterway would exacerbate these negative wildlife impacts. From a purely recreational perspective the concept is attractive. However, when one considers all of the values and issues at stake the issue is much more complex.

Given that we are already seeing negative wildlife impacts from increased recreation in the Deschutes National Forest we believe that a potential bridge that further intensifies use through an important wildlife habitat corridor is not worth the trade-off.

We are pleased to stand with a coalition of stakeholders expressing opposition or significant concern to the potential opening of the rules and related bridge. It is telling that there is such strong alignment between private property rights interests, scenic interests, recreationists, wildlife advocates, and more on an issue like this.

We support House Bill 2027-A and protecting the Deschutes River State Scenic Waterway. Thank you for your efforts to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,

Erik Fernandez
Oregon Wild