

State Senate Natural Resources and Environment Hearing
May 10,2017

Good afternoon.

My name is Stephen Thompson. I am the owner and director of the Helen M. Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary, a 45-acre nature preserve located on both sides of the river in the State Scenic Waterway. (Map.)

I've lived in Central Oregon for almost 50 years. I have a PhD in zoology, with a wildlife emphasis, and I served for eight years on the Deschutes County Planning Commission and I've served on the boards of several conservation groups.

Our history here goes back to 1967 when my father, an avid fly fisherman, bought a fishing cabin (Map) that dated back to the 50's. Along with my mother, Helen Thompson, one of Oregon's leading conservationists, they soon realized that they were looking at one of the finest stretches of river anywhere in Oregon, rich with wetlands and riparian vegetation on both sides, supplied with ample water year round, and featuring islands in the middle, all of it teeming with wildlife and highly productive of native trout.

Otters, beavers, herons, and all kinds of waterfowl inhabit these islands and waters. Bald eagles hunt and deer and elk find refuge in the winter. Birds and mammals of all kinds feed and breed in the summer throughout the preserve. There is documented Oregon spotted frog habitat on both sides of the river and the frogs have been photographed here where there are areas of open water.

The rim rock that defines the preserve rises 250' above the river in the north, the east and the south and creates a pristine wildlife corridor completely separate from the high ground around it. It is bounded on the west by the Forest Service where Bend Park's bridge site is located.

A developer could easily have put 40 high-end houses in this area but instead, my folks set out to acquire all the parcels necessary to preserve this special stretch of the river on both sides. It has taken another four decades to reach the final configuration you see here. The original cabin was rebuilt after the Awbrey Hall Fire and remains the only structure on the entire preserve.

The mission of the Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary is to conserve important year-round habitat for riparian and wetland wildlife species. This is the only stretch of river left between Bend and Sunriver without a high-use trail with pedestrians, dogs or bicycles.

This area has been identified as "significant wetlands" in the Bend Area General Plan, one of whose goals is "to preserve water resources, riparian areas, and wildlife habitats," which is also a State Goal 5 Objective. Very importantly, this is also the major river crossing for deer year round in the entire Bend area, and is crucial for the connectivity of their range from the NW to the SE (map).

I have submitted written testimony describing the unique features of this section of the river, the target wildlife species, and the Sanctuary's mission of conservation. We are now in a position to pursue our educational goal of introducing school groups to a natural, undeveloped section of river.

To conclude, a bridge at this location (map), as proposed by Parks, would severely and negatively impact the Sanctuary and its wildlife. (Photo) Our mission of conservation would be virtually eliminated. For that reason I oppose a bridge and support Bill 2027-A and its protections for the State Scenic Waterways.

Thank you for your attention.