

MY NAME IS SETH MILLER, I AM A RESIDENT OF PORTLAND, AND AM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE OREGON STATE PARKS FOUNDATION.

THE OREGON STATE PARKS FOUNDATION, AS MOST OF YOU UNDOUBTABLY KNOW, IS THE ONLY STATE-WIDE NON-PROFIT PARTNER OF THE OREGON STATE PARKS DEPARTMENT. OUR MISSION IS TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE OF USING THE OREGON STATE PARKS, TO HELP PRESERVE AND PROTECT ITS ICONIC FEATURES, AND TO ADVOCATE FOR THIS INCREDIBLE ELEMENT OF OUR STATE'S IMAGE.

IN THE COURSE OF MY WORK WITH THE FOUNDATION, I HAVE FOUND THAT MANY CITIZENS TAKE THE OREGON STATE PARKS SYSTEM FOR GRANTED, ASSUMING IT IS PAID FOR BY THEIR TAXES. FURTHER, MOST PEOPLE I TALK WITH DON'T DIFFERENTIATE THE STATE PARKS FROM ALL THE OTHER NATIONAL, COUNTY AND CITY PARKS, AND ARE VERY SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT THE OXYMORON THAT THE STATE PARKS ARE NOT FUNDED BY THEIR STATE TAXES.

IF THEY WERE HERE IN 1998 AND REMEMBER THE PASSAGE OF MEASURE 66, MOST DON'T KNOW THAT GENERAL FUNDS WERE REMOVED FROM THE PARKS BUDGET ONCE LOTTERY FUNDS WERE DEDICATED TO THE PARKS. IT IS MY UNDERSTANDING THAT THIS MOVE EFFECTIVELY NEGATED THE WILL OF THE VOTERS TO FIX THE FUNDING PROBLEMS OF THE PARKS, AND MEANT THAT MEASURE 66 RESULTED IN A NET ZERO INCREASE IN THE DEPARTMENT'S BUDGET.

MOREOVER, MOST PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW THAT THE RECESSION OF 2008 CAUSED A \$20 MILLION PER BIENIUM REDUCTION OF THE LOTTERY CONTRIBUTION TO THE PARKS SYSTEM, WHICH HAS NOT RECOVERED SINCE. NOR TO THEY KNOW THAT NEARLY \$60 MILLION OF THE LOTTERY CONTRIBUTION WAS DIVERTED TO RETIRE THE DEBT AND OPERATE THE OREGON STATE FAIR FROM 2006-2015.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE MANY OF THE IMPACTS OF THESE FUNDING SHORTAGES PERSONALLY. I HAVE VISITED MORE THAN 70 STATE PARKS IN THE PAST YEAR, AND SEEN THAT THE FIELD STAFF ARE HANGING ON BY THEIR FINGERNAILS. PARK VISITATION HAS CONTINUED TO INCREASE SIGNIFICANTLY EACH YEAR, AND THE STAFF ARE ASKED TO WEAR MORE AND MORE HATS. IT IS SURPRISING THAT THEY DON'T HAVE THEIR TONGUES HANGING OUT IN EXHAUSTION!

THERE ARE ONLY 300 YEAR-ROUND FIELD STAFF TO MANAGE 255 PARKS. THAT MEANS THAT MANY PARKS SHARE RANGERS, AND SOME LARGE PARKS - LIKE COTTONWOOD CANYON - ONLY HAVE TWO FULL TIME STAFF MEMBERS TO MANAGE AN 8,000 ACRE PARK. THE PARK STAFF ARE ASKED TO BE EVERYTHING FROM NATURE GUIDES AND INTERPRETIVE RANGERS; TO GUEST SERVICE MANAGERS - CHECKING IN GUESTS, COLLECTING MONEY, ENTERING VISITATION INFORMATION, AND SELLING FIREWOOD; TO MAINTENANCE AND JANITORIAL STAFF - CLEANING RESTROOMS, TEEPEES, YURTS AND CABINS; TO LANDSCAPERS, MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION WORKERS; TO PARK POLICE OFFICERS - MANAGING TRAFFIC, CHECKING PARKING PERMITS, ISSUING TICKETS, AND DEALING WITH BAD BEHAVIOR ON THE PART OF A FEW VISITORS. IN MANY OF THE PARKS, ONE OR TWO PEOPLE WEAR ALL OF THESE HATS.

THE OREGON STATE PARKS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE IMAGE, LIFESTYLE AND ECONOMIC VITALITY OF OUR STATE. OUR LONGEST STATE PARK, THE OREGON COAST BEACH - WHICH IS CELEBRATING ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY THIS SUMMER - IS ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC GENERATORS WE HAVE! LOOKED AT AS A SINGLE PARK, THE 362 MILE LONG BEACH, WITH ITS MORE THAN 100 STATE PARK PUBLIC ACCESS POINTS AND DOZENS OF SCENIC VIEWPOINTS, ATTRACTS MORE THAN 28 MILLION VISITORS EACH YEAR. THAT IS ALMOST FIVE TIMES AS MANY VISITORS AS THE ICONIC GRAND CANYON DRAWS EACH YEAR! WITH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ESTIMATING THAT THE RETURN TO THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES OF A DOLLAR SPENT IN THE PARKS IS A RATIO OF 26:1, YOU CAN SEE THAT THIS ONE ICONIC PART OF THE OREGON STATE PARK SYSTEM IS A SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC DRIVER ALONE.

ANOTHER ISSUE I HAVE OBSERVED FIRST HAND IN MY TRAVELS THIS PAST YEAR HAS BEEN THAT OUR PARKS HAVE GREAT VARIATIONS IN VISITATION. SOME OF THE MORE POPULAR PARKS ARE SIMPLY GETTING “OVER LOVED”. PLACES LIKE SMITH ROCK AND PILOT BUTTE IN CENTRAL OREGON ARE OVERFLOWING WITH VISITORS AND UNABLE TO KEEP UP WITH THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL PARKING, RESTROOMS AND TO DEAL WITH VISITORS WHO DO NOT STAY ON TRAILS, VANDALIZE ELEMENTS OF THE PARKS, AND LEAVE THEIR TRASH BEHIND. IN SOME OF THE CAMPGROUNDS, DEMAND IS SO HIGH THAT VISITORS HAVE TO BOOK RESERVATIONS MONTHS IN ADVANCE TO HAVE ANY PRAYER OF BEING ABLE TO GET A CAMPING SPACE, MUCH LESS A CABIN, YURT OR TEEPEE. IT SEEMS ONLY REASONABLE THAT SOME FORM OF CAPACITY MANAGEMENT AND DEMAND REDIRECTION BE EMPLOYED TO SPREAD THE USAGE ACROSS THE SYSTEM. I THINK THAT THE DEPARTMENT’S PROPOSAL TO MOVE TO A FLEXIBLE PRICING MODEL MAKES A LOT OF SENSE AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORT IT.

OUR FOUNDATION HAS BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH THE DEPARTMENT TO BRING MORE KIDS FROM DIVERSE COMMUNITIES TO THE PARKS, AND TO INCREASE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PARKS AND EDUCATION.

- THIS FALL, WE BEGAN A PROGRAM CALLED TICKET2 RIDE, IN WHICH WE PROVIDE FUNDING FOR TEACHERS IN TITLE ONE SCHOOLS ACROSS THE STATE TO TAKE THEIR STUDENTS TO A STATE PARK FOR A DAY. TO DATE, WE HAVE RAISED ENOUGH FUNDING THROUGH OUR PARTNERS/FUNDERS TO PROVIDE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO AT LEAST 9,000 STUDENTS IN THE COMING YEAR.
- ALSO, WE HAVE PARTNERED WITH THE DEPARTMENT AND EASTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY TO START AN OUTDOOR SCHOOL IN COTTONWOOD CANYON FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS. WE HOPE THIS SCHOOL WILL BE A MODEL FOR THE USE OF STATE PARK PROPERTIES TO BE USED TO HELP MEET THE NEED FOR RESIDENTIAL OUTDOOR SCHOOL CAPACITY IN RURAL PARTS OF THE STATE, TO ENSURE THAT EVERY 5TH OR 6TH GRADER ACROSS THE STATE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE ONE WEEK OF OUTDOOR SCHOOL – IN ACCORDANCE WITH MEASURE 99. THIS SPRING, THE FOUNDATION WILL SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE AN \$800,000 FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN TO CONSTRUCT A FACILITY AT COTTONWOOD CANYON STATE PARK TO SUPPORT A SUMMER INSTITUTE AND OTHER EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS. THIS PROJECT HAS ENJOYED FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM SHERMAN AND GILLIAM COUNTIES, FOUNDATIONS, CORPORATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS. CONSTRUCTION IS ANTICIPATED THIS SUMMER.

THESE PROGRAMS, HOWEVER, RUN SMACK INTO THE STAFFING CHALLENGES IN THE PARKS. BOTH INITIATIVES REQUIRE A HIGHER LEVEL OF STAFFING IN WHAT HAS FORMERLY BEEN KNOWN AS THE “SHOULDER” SEASONS – THE SPRING AND THE FALL – THAN THE DEPARTMENT IS CURRENTLY ABLE TO FUND. SOME OF THIS IS BASED ON THE AVAILABILITY OF DOLLARS, AND SOME IS BASED ON THE STATE IMPOSED LIMITATION ON STAFFING BY FTE INSTEAD OF DOLLARS. SETTING THE DEPARTMENT’S STAFFING LIMITATIONS BY FTEs INSTEAD OF DOLLARS, MEANS THAT WE AND OTHERS ARE NOT ABLE TO RAISE PRIVATE FUNDS TO SUPPLEMENT STAFFING NEEDED TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES LIKE “TICKET2RIDE” OR LIKE SOLVE’S “ADOPT A BEACH”.

IF THE DEPARTMENT IS GOING TO BE ABLE TO MOVE BEYOND BEING SIMPLY A SOURCE OF RECREATION, TO ALSO BEING A VEHICLE FOR EDUCATION;

IF WE ARE GOING TO BE ABLE TO EXPOSE MORE OF THE STATE’S CHILDREN TO OUR WONDERFUL PARKS;

IF OUR CHILDREN ARE GOING TO BECOME BETTER STEWARDS OF OUR LAND, AND GET EXPOSED TO A WIDE RANGE OF CAREER AND TECHNICAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SCIENCES, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING AND MATH;

THEN THE PARKS DEPARTMENT NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO HAVE THE APPROPRIATE STAFFING TO BE ABLE TO SUPPORT THESE ACTIVITIES.

I AM PLEASED TO BE ABLE TO STRONGLY SUPPORT THE BUDGET PROPOSAL OF THE STATE PARKS DEPARTMENT, AND HOPE YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR THE CHANGES THEY ARE REQUESTING.