

February 7, 2018

From: CDR (SEAL) Bruce R. Willhite, USN, ret. (River Rim Resident, Bend, OR)

To: House Interim Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

Subj: House Bill 4029

1. I wanted to provide additional data not included in my initial submission to the Committee, that I believe directly addresses the concerns of those that are opposed to building a footbridge in River Rim, Southeast Bend.
2. In a Bend Bulletin article February 7, 2018 Mr. Erik Fernandez (Oregon Wild) expressed concerns about the environmental impact a footbridge could have on the Oregon State Scenic Waterway, to wit: “the presence of a bridge could lead to additional hiking and biking in a sensitive nature area and could harm a variety of animals, including protected species such as the Oregon spotted frog.”
  - a. The footbridge site approved by Bend’s District Board of Directors in 2017, connects a comprehensive network of trails that have been in existence at least since the formation of Bend Parks and Recreation in May of 1974. There is also evidence that former logging roads and railroad tracks make up the framework of portions of the Deschutes River Trail (DRT) south of Bends UGB, which have been in existence since Brooks-Scanlon and Shevlin-Hixon logged this area beginning in 1916. The foundation of the pedestrian footbridge at Benham Falls (RM181.5), located in the Oregon State Scenic Waterway “*Scenic River Area*” was formerly a railroad logging bridge.
    - i. There is no indication that the current Deschutes River Trail (DRT) has had a negative impact on the ecosystem or wildlife in the Oregon State Scenic Waterway over the past 30+ years. As a former Deschutes river whitewater rafting guide and manager for Sun Country Tours, I can attest that deer, elk, beaver, river otter, eagle, osprey, brown & rainbow trout are thriving in the vicinity of the approved footbridge site.
    - ii. The Oregon Spotted Frog is currently classified as “Threatened” vice Endangered (August 28, 2014), which should not preclude building a pedestrian footbridge that would in actually provide better access in monitoring their recovery.
  - b. The Oregon State Scenic Waterway begins at the Wickiup Dam (RM226) and ends at the Urban Growth Boundary (RM 171) which is approximately 55 miles. Recreational uses currently enjoyed along the DRT include (refer to the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway “Comprehensive Management Plan”):
    - i. Recreation Sites
      1. 216 camp grounds
      2. 133 picnic areas
      3. 54 boat ramps
      4. 25 river access points
      5. 79 trailheads

- ii. Recreation Uses
    - 1. Annual designated capacity(hike/bike): 110,500
    - 2. Canoe/flat water craft: 28,400
    - 3. Patio boats: 600
    - 4. Horseback riders: 7,700
    - 5. Commercial Whitewater Rafters (Sun Country Tours, 7<sup>th</sup> Mountain Resort): 22,500 guests
  - iii. There are currently 507 sites and over 55,000 projected residents and visitors that frequent the Oregon State Scenic Waterways on the Deschutes river from Wickiup to the Bend UGB annually.
  - iv. There has been no indication that any of these activities have had a negative effect on this Oregon State Scenic Waterway. In fact, as allowed under ORS 390.805-390.925: ....the recreational area shall be administered to allow continuance of compatible existing uses, while allowing a wide range of compatible river-oriented public outdoor opportunities to the extent that these do not impair substantially the natural beauty of the scenic waterway or diminish its esthetic, fish, wildlife, scientific and recreational values.
- c. Conclusions
- i. My experience, as a River Rim resident, avid outdoorsman and river guide on the Deschutes river, is that there has been no indication of adverse effects on the core “Outstanding Remarkable Values” of the Deschutes river as identified by Congress in the 1988 Omnibus Oregon Wild and Scenic Rivers Act: *Geologic, Hydrologic, Fisheries, Vegetation, Wildlife, Cultural, Scenic, Recreation and Wilderness*.
    - 1. The addition of a footbridge (bracketed by at least ten other footbridges) in an area classified as “River Community Area” which connects to a trail system that has been in use since 1916, presents less of a negative impact on the environment than currently portrayed.
  - ii. Management: Bend Parks and Recreation District has done an outstanding job at protecting our natural resources and serving Bend residents since their inception in May of 1974. They expertly manage 2,700 acres, 81 parks, 65 miles of trails and over 1,000 related programs for the public. Upon approval of Measure 9-86 in 2012 (funding for DRT, which includes construction of the approved footbridge), BPRD formed a 22-member Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) who evaluated several trail options and five bridge alternatives. The District Board of Directors approved the current site location in 2017, after considerable analysis.
  - iii. The approved footbridge location is the only reasonable site to connect the Northeast DRT with the Southwest DRT in order to complete the 14-mile trail system from Tumalo to Sunriver (per Measure 9-86). All Southwest trails have been in existence for decades and by connecting via a footbridge to the Northeast DRT system would, in my opinion, reduce current trail density by distributing trail users over a great area.

iv. House Bill 4029

1. Prohibits person, public body or local service district from constructing bridge on Deschutes River within certain segments of Deschutes Scenic Waterway.
  - a. Currently there are no less than ten footbridges that cross the Deschutes river. The most notable is the Benham Falls footbridge located approximately ten miles upstream from the approved site near River Rim (RM 171). The Benham Falls footbridge is located in an area that is within a “Scenic River Area” as opposed to the approved site which is located in an area referred to as “River Community Area.”
2. Direct State Parks and Recreation Department to study and make recommendations to Legislative Assembly for recreational trail connecting Bend and Sunriver.
  - a. Planning documents for the DRT date back to the 1980’s and include; Bend Park and Recreation District’s Trails Master Plan, City of Bend’s Transportation System Plan, Deschutes Greenway Study and Deschutes River Trail Action Plan.
  - b. Detailed Guidance as it pertains the Oregon State Scenic Waterway is delineated in the “Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway “Comprehensive Management Plan,” date July 1996 and signed by Governor Kitzhaber and sixteen other Agencies.
  - c. BPRD formed a 22-member Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) who evaluated several trail options and five bridge alternatives, which The District Board of Directors approved in 2017.

Please refer to my previous submission for the record dated February 6, 2018 for additional background data that may be of value in making a final decision on this Bill.

CDR (SEAL) Bruce R. Willhite, USN, ret.  
River Rim Resident  
Bend, OR  
(541) 647-7078  
[bwillhite1@bendbroadband.com](mailto:bwillhite1@bendbroadband.com)