

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

W I L D L I F E *and* L I V I N G H I S T O R Y

February 13, 2019

House Committee on Economic Development

RE: SB 2052, Oregon Cultural Trust

Extends sunset for tax credit for contributions to Trust for Cultural Development Account.

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of the Board and staff at the High Desert Museum, I urge you to extend the sunset for the tax credit for contributions to the Trust for Cultural Development Account for 10 years.

The High Desert Museum has benefited significantly from the Trust. The Museum was founded in 1974 on the belief that museums should be collections of unique experiences, repositories of memories and places of discovery. Our mission is *to explore the High Desert's unique landscape, cultures, wildlife, history and arts, connecting our visitors to the past and helping them discover their role in the present and responsibility to the future.* On our 135 forested acres, our 187,000 annual visitors can engage with contemporary artwork, watch a porcupine eat a watermelon, pump water on a 1904 living history ranch, and learn about the diverse art and cultures of the High Desert. We provide innovative learning opportunities not otherwise available in our rural region. As a testament to our role in our community, in 2018, the Institute of Museum and Library Services named the Museum a finalist for a National Medal—the highest national honor for museums. **This success and service to Oregonians would not be possible without the significant funding we receive from the Oregon Cultural Trust.**

One example of how funding from the Trust is bringing significant cultural experiences to Oregonians is our groundbreaking exhibition, *Desert Reflections: Water Shapes the West* opening in April 2019. This exhibition will bring together art, science and history to explore one of the region's most crucial and controversial resources—water. We commissioned four artists from across Oregon to create work for the exhibition, including visual artist Ka'ila Farrell-Smith (Klamath Modoc), spoken word artist Jason Graham, composer Dana Reason and multimedia art organization Harmonic Laboratory. Integrating artwork with cultural and natural history will make complex issues accessible to broad audiences. Not only are we bringing significant cultural experiences to Oregonians that are not able to make it to the I-5 corridor frequently, we're supporting Oregon's culture keepers and artists by providing them time, space and funding to create meaningful and significant work.

Further, in 2017, the Trust funded another important story of life in the American West: *Blake Little: Photographs from the Gay Rodeo*. *Blake Little* opened at the Museum in December 2017. By highlighting the gay rodeo circuit, Blake Little's photographs challenge traditional understandings of western culture and advance our awareness of the different perspectives and experiences that make up our region's history. Associated programs included a lecture by Peter Boag—a history professor at Washington State University, a screening of the documentary

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Queens & Cowboys with a Q&A with the director Matt Livadary and rodeo competitor Wade Earp, and a lecture by Gregory Hinton—founder of the *Out West* program series. In addition, we partnered with the Deschutes Public Library on their series of *Know Civil Rights* programs, including a discussion of LGBTQ writers. We also hosted a related Oregon Humanities Conversation Project—*Where are Queer People Welcome?* The outpouring of support, pride and awareness that came from our community was overwhelming. These more subtle stories of Oregon’s High Desert culture need support—we’re proud to partner with the Trust to ensure that all Oregonians’ stories are represented in museums.

A final example of the Trust’s support that created a significant cultural experience was our *Art for a Nation: Inspiration from the Great Depression* exhibition in 2016. This exhibition merged contemporary and historic artwork to explore the artistic legacy of the Works Progress Administration in Oregon. *Art for a Nation* won Honorable Mention for the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies Award for Exhibition Excellence for its innovative exhibit design and community programming. Through extensive partnerships, we offered 25 associated programs, immersing our region in the arts. We also commissioned three nationally renowned artists, Marie Watt, David Willis and Allan McCollum, to produce artwork in conversation with the exhibit theme. We recently accessioned Marie Watt’s *Blanket Stories* into our permanent collection. Constructed of blankets donated by community members, this sculpture tells the diverse, intergenerational stories of our community and is representative of our vision for our growing contemporary art collection. Again, this kind of exhibition is not possible without the support of the Trust.

The High Desert Museum is the cultural caretaker of Oregon’s High Desert. We house almost 29,000 objects, including 7,000 Plateau American Indian artifacts, that each tell significant stories of Oregon’s past. Moreover, we are actively collecting to ensure that the curators of the future have the right objects to capture the significant moments that are happening now. We’re also proud and fortunate to partner with the five cultural partners of the Trust on various projects including embedding the recently passed SB13 into our educational programs, hosting Conversation Projects from Oregon Humanities, bringing a historic structure to the Museum’s property with the support of the State Historic Preservation Office, and supporting arts education in rural Oregon with the help of the Oregon Arts Commission. None of this would be possible without the Oregon Cultural Trust.

Thank you for considering the 10-year extension. The value of the Trust is alive and well every day at the High Desert Museum—I hope you’ll come see your hard work in action soon. And, thank you for working hard for Oregon.

Appreciatively,



Dana Whitelaw
Executive Director