



Senate Committee on Finance & Revenue
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

April 24, 2019

Re: Senate Bill 431

Chair Hass and Members of the Committee,

The management of the 27-mile levee system that runs along the Columbia River in the Portland metro region has been separated from the health of the natural landscape around it for far too long. Although the four drainage districts responsible for managing the levee system have done their best to leverage partnerships to incorporate environmental benefits in recent years, they are operating under an outdated governance structure that was established to “reclaim” the land for economic benefit. At that time, people did not understand the long-term consequences of these decisions, but we can no longer use the same excuse today.

Fast-forward over a century, and today, the Columbia Corridor levee system surrounds a large portion of the Columbia Slough watershed, a 50 square mile drainage basin that begins with Fairview Creek in east Gresham and runs westward to Kelley Point Park where the Willamette River meets the Columbia River in Portland. The watershed is a unique mosaic of wetlands, channels, ponds, lakes, and waterways interspersed among homes, industrial-use properties, two airports, four marine terminals, and three major interstates. The Slough and its watershed provides habitat for migratory birds and threatened fish and wildlife while also serving as a major economic hub for the region. In addition, it is a recreational oasis with 19 miles of water trails for kayaking and canoeing; a regional network of trails for walking, hiking, and biking; and multiple wildlife reserves for naturalists and youth to explore.

After years of work, those of us who are dedicated to improving water quality, can proudly say that it is the cleanest it has been in over a century. But there is still a great deal of work to be done. Managing the Columbia Slough watershed for environmental, economic, and social benefits is a big job that no single organization can do on their own. The passage of Senate Bill 431 rewards efficiency and innovative problem-solving and will make it easier for private and public organizations to partner in enhancing and protecting the watershed. Modern flood management is not just about building taller levees but including nature as an asset that complements and enhances the built infrastructure in the area.



Senate Bill 431 takes the important step of recognizing that the managed floodplain includes not just the levees but also natural infrastructure like the wetlands, ponds, and open spaces beyond. These green spaces accomplish multiple goals, easing the burden on the levee system by soaking up rainfall and releasing the water slowly over time, while also reducing pollution and creating habitat for fish, birds, and wildlife.

In the Slough we know that the best way to achieve long-term prosperity is to take care of all of our assets. We ask that you stand with us by voting yes for Senate Bill 431.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathy P. Kellon". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Cathy P. Kellon
Executive Director

The Columbia Slough Watershed Council, a non-profit-tax exempt organization, is a diverse group of stakeholders working to restore and enhance the 60 miles of waterways known as the Columbia Slough, located in Portland, Gresham, and Fairview. All donations are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Our IRS Tax Identification number is 03-0456181. For more information you can visit our website at www.columbiaslough.org.