



Audubon Society of Portland
Bridgeton Neighborhood Assn.
City of Fairview
City of Gresham
City of Portland
Bureau of Environmental Services
Bureau of Transportation
Portland Parks & Recreation
Portland Water Bureau
City of Troutdale
Columbia Corridor Association
Columbia Slough Watershed Council
East Columbia Neighborhood Assn.
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Jubitz Corporation
Metro
Multnomah County
Multnomah County Drainage District
Peninsula Drainage District #1
Peninsula Drainage District #2
Port of Portland
State of Oregon
Dept. of Environmental Quality
Dept. of Land Conservation & Development
Governor's Regional Solutions Team
US Army Corps of Engineers

April 25, 2019

Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 431

Chair Hass and Members of the Committee,

The 27-mile levee system running from North Portland through Gresham, Fairview, and Troutdale, reduces the risk of flooding for over 7,500 residents, 2,500 businesses, 59,000 jobs, and critical public infrastructure, habitat, and greenspaces.

Although the infrastructure is old and in need of major repairs, the four drainage districts responsible for maintaining this levee system are only equipped to fund basic operations and maintenance with limited capital improvements. As a result, the levee system is out of compliance with new federal standards set by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012. FEMA certification of the levee system has expired, which means that FEMA could revoke accreditation and remap the area as floodplain any time.

Losing FEMA accreditation of the levee system would mean that:

- landowners behind the levees would no longer be eligible for affordable flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP);
- mortgage holders would be required to purchase flood insurance at much higher rates;
- the cities and would have to implement new zoning and building codes to elevate buildings above flood levels; and
- the region would lose access to a portion of its undeveloped industrial land and associated jobs.

Over the last five years, the Levee Ready Columbia partnership has completed the first ever comprehensive geotechnical investigation of the levee system, which identified a number of deficiencies that will need to be addressed to recertify the levees, as well as a slate of other technical issues associated with the age of the infrastructure. Through this work, the partners also identified that a long-term solution is needed to bring the levees up to modern standards and to ensure the infrastructure is adequately supported going forward.

Thanks to the leadership of the legislators whose districts include portions of the managed floodplain, we are able to present you with that long-term solution through Senate Bill 431. This legislation creates an Urban Flood Safety & Water Quality District in urban Multnomah County to simplify and modernize the oversight and funding of the Columbia Corridor levee system. Our partnership has worked hard to reach consensus around each provision within the bill to deliver a proposal that is designed to:

- a) meet long-term flood safety needs;
- b) allow for a more equitable distribution of costs based on services rendered and benefits received;
- c) move to a more inclusive board selection process; and
- d) establish a connection between the management of the flood safety infrastructure and the health of the of natural landscape around it.

Establishing an Urban Flood Safety & Water Quality District is needed to reduce the risk of flooding in an area critical to the region's future, to meet shifting federal standards, and to support the improvement of the environmental value of the managed floodplain.

Additionally, we have an important opportunity to secure significant federal funding for the levee system as the US Army Corps of Engineers currently works on a federally-authorized study of the levee system, which will culminate with the Corps delivering recommendations to Congress to improve the resiliency of the levee system, along with funding requests to complete up to 65% of their recommendations. If we move quickly to put a modernized governance structure in place, we will be better equipped to leverage this opportunity, thereby reducing the overall capital improvement costs that will need to be borne by Oregonians.

Although there is always some risk with change, doing nothing presents a far greater risk to the state, the region, and all the people who rely on the levee system to protect their lives and livelihoods. We ask to you to stand with Levee Ready Columbia, and all the people who rely on the Columbia River levee system, by voting yes on Senate Bill 431.

Sincerely,

The Levee Ready Columbia partnership