

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
Jubit 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

June 11, 2019

House Committee on Revenue
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 431

Chair Nathanson & Members of the Committee,

A 27-mile levee system runs from North Portland through Gresham, Fairview, and Troutdale, reducing the risk of flooding for over 7,500 residents, 2,500 businesses that generate over 59,000 jobs and \$16 billion in economic activity each year, along with important public infrastructure like the Portland International Airport, and wildlife habitat and greenspaces.

The four drainage districts responsible for maintaining this levee system were set up over a century ago and are not equipped to manage and fund a major urban flood safety system. As a result, the levee system is not in compliance with new federal safety standards set by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) following Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy. FEMA certification of the levee system has expired, which means FEMA could revoke accreditation of the levees and remap the area as a floodplain any time. Losing accreditation and being remapped as a floodplain would mean that:

- residents and businesses behind the levees would no longer have access to lower-cost 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 county would be required 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 any associated jobs.

Over the last five years, Levee Ready Columbia (LRC) – a partnership of over twenty public, private, nonprofit, and community-based organizations – has been working to maintain federal accreditation of the levee system. As a part of these efforts, LRC has completed the first comprehensive geotechnical investigation of the levee system, which identified multiple 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. This work also demonstrated to the partners that a long-term solution is needed to bring the levees up to modern standards and ensure the system is adequately

supported going forward.

Thanks to the leadership of the legislators who represent 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 that will simplify and modernize the management and funding of the Columbia Corridor levee system. Our partnership has worked hard to reach consensus on this proposal and deliver a framework that has been designed to:

- a) meet long-term flood safety needs;
- b) be able to adjust shifting federal standards;
- c) allow for an equitable distribution of costs based on services and benefits received;
- d) be able to adapt to changing river conditions due to climate change;
- e) be more inclusive and engage more voices in the board selection process and decision-making; and
- f) recognize the connection between the flood safety system and the natural landscape around it and allow for contributions to be made to improve water quality and wildlife habitat in the managed floodplain.

We need to move quickly to put this improved governance structure in place so FEMA can see we are making forward progress on our efforts to recertify the levees. We also have an important opportunity to secure significant federal funding for the levee system as the US Army Corps of Engineers works to complete a federally-authorized study of the levee system. This study will culminate with the Corps delivering recommendations to Congress to improve the resiliency of the levee system along with a request to fund up to 65% of their recommended improvements. Having this modernized governance structure in place, will put us in a much better position to leverage this opportunity and thereby reduce the capital improvement costs that will need to be borne by Oregonians.

Please stand with Levee Ready Columbia and all the people who rely on the levee system to protect their lives and livelihoods by voting yes on Senate Bill 431.

Sincerely,

The LRC partnership