



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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RE: Testimony in support of HB 2125

Chair Lively, Vice-Chair Cate, Vice-Chair Kropf, and Members of the Committee,

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) requests your support for HB 2125 to study the impact of lost revenue during the COVID-19 pandemic on outdoor recreation and tourism throughout Oregon.

OPRD operates the state park system without any General Fund revenue, through a combination of park visitor fees, a share of the recreation vehicle registration fee—which make up more than half the funding—and a share of constitutionally-dedicated Lottery approved by Oregon voters in 1999 and 2010.

As it was for many Oregonians, 2020 was a tough year for OPRD. In one fell swoop, the economy depressed Oregon Lottery funds and park closures effectively stopped any revenues coming into the agency for months. To address the immediate financial crisis, the agency did not return 371 seasonal positions last summer, laid off 47 fulltime staff and stopped numerous repair and upgrade projects in parks.

Now, based on the economic realities of our current situation, the agency is developing a new vision and strategy to move us forward. We are taking a hard look at all of our financial and businesses practices to improve efficiencies. We have refocused staff and partnerships to prioritize the state park system and community heritage programs while reaching out to Oregonians who may be new to the benefits of both.

With the passage of HB 2125, OPRD would work with outdoor recreation and tourism providers to identify funding and operational efficiencies that can be gained through innovation, increased collaboration and changes to service delivery models. The agency would submit a report with the results of the study and recommendations for legislation to an interim legislative committee by September 15, 2022.

2022 represents the Centennial celebration of Oregon Park and Recreation Department. What started in 1922 with the donation of a small, shady park along the Luckiamute River by Sarah Helmick and her family has become an integral part of what makes Oregon a great place to live. HB 2125 will examine how we continue to thrive for the next one hundred years.

HB 2125 also includes authorization for \$100 million in lottery bonding to pay for state park projects. This funding would be utilized to pay for projects that were stopped or delayed as funding was cut during the COVID-19 emergency and allow for projects to move forward that can position the agency to meet the needs of Oregonians as we move into our second century of protecting Oregon's special places while providing great experiences.