



May 05, 2021

Oregon State Legislature
Joint Committee on Ways & Means
Subcommittee on Education
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Bill Harvey
Commission Chair
bharvey@bakercounty.org

Dear Senator Frederick and Representative McLain:

Mark Bennett
Commissioner
mbennett@bakercounty.org

I am writing to request the Oregon Joint Committee on Ways and Means support full funding for the important statewide program **Oregon Consensus**, funded as part of the dispute resolution services allocation within the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) budget. As a Baker County Commissioner, I have experienced firsthand the benefit this program provides in helping to support community based problem solving.

Bruce A. Nichols
Commissioner
bnichols@bakercounty.org

A perennial issue for government decision-makers and citizens in eastern Oregon is the balance between natural resource use and protection. We hear from and work with diverse values tied to the natural world, including those held by both local constituents and Oregonians in more urbanized areas. This affects our economic and social well-being, the shape and health of what we call Oregon, and cultural issues wrapped up in urban-rural divide. These dynamics have played out front and center two contexts where Oregon Consensus has helped: (1) the potential Endangered Species Act listing of sage-grouse, and (2) wildfire planning. Oregon Consensus worked across diverse interests to facilitate important Wildfire Mitigation Committee agreements within the Governor's 2020 Wildfire Council work. Further, for five-plus years, Oregon Consensus has project-managed the SageCon Partnership, which has created a collaborative governance structure with working tables and relationships whereby decision-makers and interests of various stripes can work out issues collectively to advance proactive programs, projects, and investments.

The Oregon Consensus program provides very distinct and critical independent services to communities across the State in reaching agreement on contentious issues and supporting implementation of sustainable solutions. This benefits people not just in my community but the State as a whole. I am thankful the legislature recognizes the significance of this program, and hope it will continue to be supported.

Sincerely,

Mark Bennett, Baker County Commissioner

cc:

State Senator Michael Dembrow
State Senator Chuck Thomsen
State Representative Teresa Alonso Leon
State Representative Bobby Levy
State Representative E. Werner Reschke

State Representative Rieki Ruiz
Joan Green, Committee Assistant
Doug Wilson, LFO
Audrey Nieswandt, LFO