



To
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
600 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon

Date: 02.10.2021

Sub: Testimony in support of HB 2171 – Making Outdoors Accessible to All

Chair Witt, Vice Chair Breese Iverson, Vice Chair Hudson and members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) and Humane Voters Oregon, we would like to submit this testimony in support of HB 2171 with its -2 amendments. Our organizations protect wildlife and wild places not only for its ecological functions but also for the value it holds for people and their well-being. This is why we support HB 2171 in making outdoors accessible to all Oregonians.

Conservation of nature and outdoor recreation is often a privilege in our communities, and privilege can take many forms. It can be a privilege of wealth, for instance, whether you can afford to spend time in outdoor recreation, travel to a place or buy the necessary gear. It can also be a privilege of culture — whether you have traditional or family history and support that will encourage you to spend time outdoors. Lack of such a privilege can hold an individual or a community back. We believe that Oregon's natural resources and its benefits is a right of all Oregonians, and not a privilege of few. HB 2171 addresses these issues using two primary vehicles — The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) and the Office of Outdoor Recreation under the Department of Parks and Recreation. It also further solidifies and formalizes the relationship between these two vehicles.

The first vehicle, OCRF, was established in 2019 through the legislature with the goal of promoting grassroots level initiatives in making conservation and recreation more inclusive of all Oregonians. Through OCRF, our state recognized that the complexities as well as the challenges of promoting conservation and recreation cannot be addressed by a state level solution, given the diversity of our landscapes and of Oregonians. Instead, by funding local and grassroots groups and organizations, OCRF empowers them to develop innovative ideas and find local solutions to address conservation and recreation needs in their communities. This bottom-up approach to conservation and recreation is unique within Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and should be encouraged and supported by the state. When OCRF was formed, it was under the condition that their Advisory Committee will fundraise and the state will match the raise to a \$1million in General Fund moneys. However, that General Fund dollars were taken away in 2020, leaving OCRF stranded with whatever amount they manage

to fundraise. OCRF Advisory Committee has done an excellent job in fundraising and in using the raised dollars to support several rounds of local projects in the state. But promoting stewardship of our natural resources should not be the responsible of our private citizens and entities alone. It is equally the state's responsibility. Reinstating the \$1million match in General Fund dollars will significantly improve OCRF ability to fund community-led conservation and recreation efforts. At the same time, OCRF has proven in the past two years that its model works perfectly, so the sunset clause on OCRF should be removed and OCRF should be made permanent.

The other vehicle is the Office of Outdoor Recreation with Dept of Parks and Recreation. The Office of Outdoor Recreation was recently established, following the recommendations of the Governor's Outdoors Task Force. This bill further strengthens this office and its relationship with Department of Parks and Recreation by making establishing an Advisory Committee. It lays out the structure of such a committee along with its roles and responsibilities. The goal of having such an Advisory Committee is to develop better design and standards, monitoring and project implementation within the Office of Outdoor Recreation so that the Office is better equipped to address the needs of Oregonians and the challenges they face in accessing outdoors.

Finally, the bill formalizes the already existing relationship between OCRF and the Office of Outdoor Recreation, where the Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation serves as a non-voting member on OCRF's Advisory Committee. This relationship brings cohesion between the two bodies' mission and opens up possibility of future strategic collaborations in making outdoors more accessible across the state.

These three aspects of the bill addresses issues of outdoor accessibility in a holistic manner. 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us more than ever that connection with nature and having access to wilderness and wild places has an unquantifiable but significant role in our mental and overall well-being. When we are limited and restricted in our ability to connect with one another, nature is the one common connection we have and through HB 2171 we want to ensure that it remains true for all Oregonians.

We would be happy to address any further questions you might have. Contact information: skamal@defenders.org

Thanking you

Sincerely

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