

Deschutes Land Trust

210 NW IRVING AVENUE, SUITE 102
BEND, OREGON 97703
OFFICE: (541) 330-0017
DESCHUTESLANDTRUST.ORG



CONSERVATION. COMMUNITY. CARING FOR THE LAND.

February 12, 2024

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

Re: Support for Recreational Immunity Protections through SB 1576

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

The Deschutes Land Trust, based in Bend, conserves and cares for 18,742 acres of land in Central Oregon so that local communities and the natural world can flourish together for generations to come. We write to you today in strong support of SB 1576 and the -3 amendment, provisions that would restore recreational immunity protections for public and private land open for recreational opportunities.

As of 2023, there were 90 land trust properties open for public use in Oregon. The Oregon Public Use of Lands Act encourages public and private landowners to make their land available to the public for recreational purposes by providing landowners immunity from liability. However, a recent Oregon Court of Appeals decision undermined the immunity guaranteed in the Act, which would result in a severe reduction of land available for Oregonians to enjoy.

The Deschutes Land Trust currently owns and stewards over 2,200 acres of land as Community Preserves. Our Community Preserves are open to the public to enjoy and explore through over 25 miles of trails. Without the recreational immunity protections provided in SB 1576 and the -3 amendment, Deschutes Land Trust and all Oregon land trusts could face costly litigation and increased liability insurance premiums due to the decision in *Fields vs. City of Newport*. The passage of SB 1576 with the -3 amendment would provide important safeguards so we can continue to allow public access to trails and recreational opportunities on our lands over the summer season.

Please support the passage of SB 1576 and the -3 amendment in the 2024 legislative session. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Natasha Bellis".

Natasha Bellis

Conservation Director