

Submitter: DJ Fletcher

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3173

Date: February 5, 2025

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Re: Support for HB 3173 (2025) -- Funding for OregonFlora Program

Dear Co-Chairs Rep. Helm and Rep. Owens; Vice-Chair Rep. McDonald; and Committee Members:

As a Southern Oregon conservation voter and outdoor enthusiast, I write to ask for your support of HB 3173, which will provide stable funding for Oregon State University to maintain the OregonFlora Program, our "comprehensive guide to the vascular plants of Oregon."

First, for clarity, I think it is helpful to revisit the Program's function: OregonFlora maintains "information about all the native and exotic plants of the state—ferns, conifers, grasses, herbs, and trees—that grow in the wild." In other words, a guide to the vascular plants group includes information on all plants except non-vascular plants like mosses, lichens, green algae, and fungi. But I note, especially for us "mushroom foragers," that the OregonFlora Herbarium feature gives access to non-vascular plants, including fungi. The OregonFlora database and freely-accessible website at <https://oregonflora.org> is truly an invaluable data-resource that benefits all Oregonians -- both government and citizens. The website offers mapped plant-occurrence records, color photos, comprehensive search and identification tools, fact sheets for every plant species, and more -- including a superb list of links to recommended resources.

OregonFlora is widely used by local and state government decision-makers; public and private land managers; ecologists and landscape architects; and by individuals, students, teachers, and others needing comprehensive data about Oregon botanical nomenclature, native plant gardening, wild plant eco-tourism, and many other topics. It can be a fun tool to use to map out plant identity along hiking trails, but it is actually a vital tool to facilitate plant research, biodiversity and conservation land-planning, and much more.

In asking you to support OregonFlora as the tool for preserving biodiversity through identifying native plant species, I also point to the flip side: the literal cost of failing to

identify non-native plant species. As one writer put it, "Invasive plant species might seem ho-hum to the typical Oregonian, but these noxious weeds are extremely costly to mitigate and prevent." State agencies and municipalities know this. Estimates vary, but more than a decade ago, the Oregon Department of Agriculture study of "Economic Impact from Selected Noxious Weeds in Oregon" stated that "Oregon experiences annual losses of over \$80 million to personal income from just 25 state-listed noxious weeds. If left to spread, these species could cost an estimated \$1.8 billion in annual losses."

It is easy to find reasons why we all need OregonFlora to remain a top-shelf tool. Yet, despite OregonFlora's vital importance, the program has had to rely on funding from grants and donations since its inception in 1994.

Please support HB 3173 so that the OregonFlora Program will receive the State funding it so deserves.

I thank you for the opportunity to comment on this legislative proposal.

DJ Fletcher
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