

RE: SB 1593 SUPPORT - Oregon Recreation Commerce and Affordability Act of 2026 (ORCA)

Chair Meek, Vice-Chair Drazan, and members of the committee,

My name is Bob Spencer, and I am the owner of McKenzie River Fishing Guides and Rafting Tours |Spencer Outfitters, a family-business sole proprietorship and fly fishing and whitewater guide service located at 45129 McKenzie Highway in Vida, Oregon. For over 40 years, my family has operated on the McKenzie River, teaching traditional fly fishing techniques, leading whitewater rafting trips, and connecting visitors and locals alike with the incredible outdoor recreation opportunities that define our community and our state.

I strongly support the Oregon Recreation Commerce and Affordability Act of 2026 (ORCA) - SB1593.

Spencer Outfitters is more than a business—we are cultural stewards of McKenzie River heritage. We employ local guides, support other valley businesses, and serve as a gathering place for people to experience Oregon's rivers responsibly and safely. Our work preserves traditional knowledge of drift boat fishing and connects generations to the natural landscapes that make Oregon extraordinary. Guiding is essential to the McKenzie Valley's economic recovery following the 2020 Holiday Farm Fire, providing jobs and visitor services that sustain our corridor's small businesses.

However, as a family-business sole proprietorship, we are constantly grappling with rising overhead costs that inhibit our ability to grow or stabilize. We take advantage of every opportunity—like the Lane County Cultural Coalition grant for cultural heritage preservation—but it's not enough to keep prices affordable and pay our staff a living wage when insurance premiums and legal liability costs continue to escalate. Over the past decade, Oregon's recreation liability environment has deteriorated to the point where outfitters face the very real possibility that we will not be able to obtain affordable insurance—or any insurance at all. The lack of enforceable participant waivers forces us to absorb costs that should be shared through transparent risk agreements, driving up trip prices, suppressing guide wages, and limiting access for families and individuals who want to experience Oregon's rivers but cannot afford premium pricing.

We are at a tipping point. After 10 years of worsening conditions, this legislation arrives just in time. Without ORCA, many Oregon outfitters—including long-established family operations like ours—may be forced to close, taking with them decades of local knowledge, employment opportunities, and the infrastructure that makes outdoor recreation accessible and safe.

ORCA is a simple, balanced solution that restores what Oregon used to do and what every other Western state already does. It brings Oregon in line with our neighboring states and with federal public lands policy. This is not an experimental approach—it is a proven framework that protects both outfitters and participants by establishing clear, enforceable standards. Montana, Idaho, Washington, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and California all use similar waiver systems, enabling their outdoor recreation industries to thrive while maintaining safety and accountability. Oregon should not be the outlier that undermines its own sustainable tourism economy.

I also support the state conducting an economic study to quantify Oregon's outdoor recreation industry. Our sector provides substantial employment, supports rural communities, generates tax revenue, and attracts visitors who spend money across Oregon's economy. Understanding this impact will help legislators make informed decisions about policies that affect thousands of recreation-based businesses statewide.

Thank you for championing this critical legislation. Spencer Outfitters and the McKenzie Valley community depend on your leadership to ensure we can continue getting Oregonians and visitors outside to experience the rivers, forests, and mountains that define our state's identity. ORCA will preserve Oregon's outdoor recreation heritage for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,

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