

Testimony in support of the -1 amendment to HB 2027

Dear Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

I am writing in support of the -1 amendment to HB 2027. I am a resident of Bend and live on the other side of town from the bridge that the Bend Park and Recreation District (BPRD) seeks to build in the Upper Deschutes State Scenic Waterway. I was the first volunteer trail adopter in the portion of the Deschutes National Forest that is immediately upriver of the proposed bridge location. That area is federally-designated as a wild and scenic river in addition to a state scenic waterway, and I believe a bridge would significantly undermine the outstandingly remarkable wildlife, recreation, and other values (ORVs) that motivated these designations.

During a 2015 State Parks (OPRD) hearing, participants in the management process that led to the bridge prohibition testified that the prohibition was not accidental, but rather was intended to sustain these values and the special character of the area.

I am writing in my private capacity as an Oregonian. However, I have the perspective of a forestry professor who specializes in outdoor recreation and survey research. Under contract with State Parks (OPRD), I have implemented most of the statewide recreation surveys they have conducted in the past decade. This includes the non-motorized boater survey from the fall of 2014, in which Oregonians who engage in that activity were asked which quality is the single most important for a waterbody to be considered for inclusion in the State Scenic Waterway program. "Opportunities for recreation" was reported as the most important quality for 9.6% of respondents. Bend Parks and Rec (BPRD) and Oregon State Parks (OPRD) often do a good job of developing recreation facilities and managing areas for this quality, prioritized by about 10% of Oregonians.

Another 9.6% said "Opportunities for solitude (few other people recreating)" is the most important quality, while 30.5% said "Natural environment" is most important and 30.7% said "Habitat for fish and wildlife" is most important. We need someone to stand up for these qualities, which, combined, are prioritized as most important by 71% of Oregonians. I am submitting these comments in support of our State Legislature protecting these qualities on behalf of Oregonians.

These results from statewide surveys conducted by State Parks are consistent with the intent of voters who passed the Oregon Scenic Waterways Act in 1970 and protected the Upper Deschutes Scenic Waterway in 1988. They also are consistent with public input during the processes conducted by State Parks (OPRD). I participated in their October 28, 2015, hearing in Bend, where the majority of input was in support of sustaining the bridge prohibition and in opposition to BPRD's proposed bridge. I testified at the November 18, 2015, OPRD commission meeting in Hood River, where, again, significant concerns were expressed.

OPRD decided to hold another process, which included the Upper Deschutes Advisory Group (UDAG), multiple "neighborhood/public meetings," and several months of an online "crowdsourcing" public input form. I participated as a member of the UDAG, I attended one of the public meetings, and results of the crowdsourcing process were described in UDAG meetings I attended. This second OPRD process produced the same result as the October, 2015, hearing – a significant majority of citizens support sustaining the prohibition and have strong concerns about BPRD's proposed bridge.

As a participant and observer of this process, I have been concerned that Bend Parks and Rec (BPRD) and State Parks (OPRD) have downplayed important considerations, including the impact of a bridge on the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) that OPRD has a responsibility to sustain as a signatory to the Upper Deschutes Wild and Scenic River and State Scenic Waterway Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP). I believe most residents of Bend, and most Oregonians, would vote to sustain the bridge prohibition when informed how a bridge would undermine those values and other state scenic waterway commitments, including protection of private property rights.

Indeed, citizens have expressed such support through their votes in 1970 and 1988, through their responses to OPRD's statewide survey in 2014, and through their public comment from 2015 to 2017. Despite this public support for the prohibition, it is my understanding that OPRD continues to consider its removal and that BPRD would proceed with the bridge (after the one-year waiting period) even if the prohibition remained in place.

I encourage the Oregon State Legislature to "put teeth" into the bridge rule by voting in favor of HB 2027 with the -1 amendment. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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