

July 1, 2017

Dear Senator Girod, Representative Holvey and members of the Committee:

My name is Connie Soper, and this letter is in support of HB 3149. This bill, sponsored by Representative David Brock Smith, would result in the development of an Action Plan for completing the Oregon Coast Trail.

The Oregon Coast Trail is a 372-mile trail that stretches from the Columbia River to the California border, offering unparalleled scenic beauty and the opportunity for hikers to visit nearly all of Oregon's public beaches. In fact, about half the trail is walked along the shoreline, while other segments traverse headlands and capes, over historic bridges, and through coastal towns. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for oversight of the Oregon Coast Trail, and first designated it as an official trail over 40 years ago. However, the Oregon Coast Trail is still a work in progress, because nearly 50 miles of it have not been completed, requiring hikers to walk along the shoulder of US Highway 101 or on other roads not suitable for pedestrian use. This arrangement is neither scenic nor safe.

The most significant gaps in the trail occur in Tillamook, Lincoln, Lane, Coos and Curry Counties, and they range in length from 2 miles to 11 miles.

A completed Oregon Coast Trail offers many benefits for those wishing to hike the entire length of the coast, as well as for local coastal communities. Some of these benefits include:

- Greatly improved safety for hikers by eliminating the need to walk along the shoulder of a busy highway
- "Village-to-village" walking, which will allow for hikers to stay in towns along the way if they don't want to camp or carry a backpack
- Realization of increased economics as a result of more hikers arranging for lodging, meals and other amenities in local communities
- Increased visibility and interest in the OCT, which is likely to attract more visitors
- Enhanced recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike

The Action Plan will identify steps and activities needed to complete the segments of the trail currently located along the highway or on other major road without pedestrian access. Further, the Action Plan will build on previous OPRD planning efforts to:

- Investigate potential routing options, to consider land ownership, geographic constraints, and other factors to determine trail development
- Recommend preferred solutions for the gaps

- Where opportunities exist, collaborate with other public or private landowners such as the US Forest Service, and Oregon Department of Transportation to assess feasibility of developing new trail
- Prioritize development of new trail segments based on improved safety, immediacy of implementation, potential project sponsors
- Identify potential sources of funding for implementation of new trail segments

Numerous letters of support were submitted from coastal chambers of commerce or other tourist centers, hiking groups, and individuals who recognize the importance of this legislation, and how it will advance completion of the Oregon Coast Trail.

Specifically, its passage will result in:

- A comprehensive and coordinated approach for addressing trail gaps
- A framework to encourage potential funders
- Enhanced interagency collaboration
- Development of specific projects well positioned to compete for grant funding for trail construction

Thank you for your consideration of HB 3149 and again, I urge your support to ensure its passage.

Sincerely,

Connie Soper
Portland, OR