

Dear Committee Members,

I want to express my opposition to House Bill 4029 which would ban bridges on a stretch of the Deschutes River by my home.

As a fourth generation Oregonian, I greatly value access to our public lands for recreation. I hike, bike, horseback ride, camp, backpack, ski, snowshoe, paddle board, canoe, birdwatch and more on public lands and state waterways regularly. Outdoor recreation is not only a fun, enjoyable part of my lifestyle but it is even a key element in my personal health. In addition, I make my living as a recreation professional with Bend Park & Recreation District. With that disclosed, please know that my opinion I share with you today is my own personal viewpoint.

My opposition to a bridge ban is simple. A bridge equals improved public access, better recreation experiences and reduced vehicle traffic. A ban does not.

A pedestrian and cyclist bridge across the Deschutes River at the southern end of Bend would give me and my neighbors access to US Forest Service lands for numerous recreation opportunities and we wouldn't have to drive six to eleven miles to do so. We'd save gas, save emissions, save road wear-and-tear, save traffic congestion, save parking lot spaces, save time sitting in a car. We'd gain fresh air, smell the scent of the pines, hear the sound of the river, marvel at the sight of an osprey diving for a fish, share a sense of belonging within nature and wave a hello or two to our fellow southwest Bend neighbors. Nature and play together! This is all good and follows the intent of Oregon's Scenic Waterways Program.

I understand those wanting the ban are making a argument for protecting the environment and wildlife. I value a healthy environment and content wildlife, too! I'm a true nature nerd. But I know that when properly designed and managed, trails and bridges can coexist successfully with both humans and nature. It's been done many a time, even on the same Deschutes River, even just a few miles away!

It's important to note that while the proposed bridge location is lovely, it's not a pristine wilderness environment as some may represent. There's currently a 70-plus home development under construction very close by and there's not a place on or near the river that you don't see a house, including the large, luxury homes belonging to several people who want the ban. I don't think the argument is about the environment but instead I think those folks would rather not have me and my neighbors access the public lands by their luxury homes. But I believe in access to public lands for all Oregonians - big house, little house, apartment or condo, on a bike, on foot, or even, if needed to avoid unnecessarily driving a car miles on already congested roadways, by a bridge.

Thank for your attention to this matter. I urge you to vote "no" on HB 4029.

Sincerely,
Colleen McNally
Southwest Bend

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Colleen

Colleen McNally
(541) 598-7514
cmcnally541@gmail.com