

Hamre Jaime

From: Bruce Johnson <brucej331@gmail.com>
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To: HAGNR Exhibits
Subject: HB4029 comments

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I am writing in support of HB 4029.

For several years I have been a frequent user of the Rimrock trail network of the Deschutes National Forest (commonly called the 'Good Dog' area) on the west side of the Deschutes River in the area of the proposed footbridge over the river. Like many Bend residents, I typically drive (in my case three or four miles) to the Rimrock trailhead parking lot, then walk with my dogs along the trails to the river frontage. It is the only convenient trail network, with river access in the summer, close to Bend, that allows extensive hiking with dogs off-leash. There are no trails within the entire park system controlled by Bend Parks and Recreation that allow dogs off leash, and BPRD staff have expressed consistent opposition to off-leash trail use. Although there are several fenced and partially fenced dog parks in Bend, they do not afford the same opportunity for hiking, biking and running with dogs for long distances that can be found in the Rimrock area. There are more than 10 miles of user created trails and closed service roads in the approximately one square mile area defined as 'Good Dog'. On a typical day more than 200 people use the trail network. This number has been steadily increasing as more people, from Bend and increasing from other parts of the state, become aware of the unique opportunity that the 'Good Dog' trail network provides for recreation with dogs off-leash. The typical user currently hikes, bikes or runs with their dogs a mile or more to the river, allows their dogs to play in the water for a short time in the area of the proposed bridge, then returns to the trailhead.

Building a bridge from the east side of the river to the Rimrock area of the Deschutes National Forest could bring hundreds more visitors per day to the short stretch of river access at the bridge terminus. Despite arguments that the bridge will provide access to hiking and biking opportunities of the vast Forest Service trail network for residents of SE Bend, the reality is that the majority of people using the bridge will stay predominantly along the river within the half mile or so adjacent to the bridge, placing undue user pressure in that area. Identifying the bridge and trails to the west of the bridge as part of the Deschutes River Trail will undoubtedly lead to conflicts between people with off-leash dogs and those who prefer to avoid off-leash dogs, and to the eventual restrictions of off-leash recreation in that area, as we have already seen on Bend Parks and Recreation properties and on Forest Service trails along the rest of the Deschutes River Trail.

I believe that the best interests of the population of Bend, and indeed the entire state, would be served by prohibiting the construction of the footbridge for several reasons:

- > As the population of Bend grows, there is an increased need to preserve natural areas, not sacrifice them.
- > BPRD's often quoted argument that 80% of Bend's population support the bridge is erroneous, based on targeted polling and misleading information. (For example that the bridge is needed to complete the Deschutes River Trail). Comments submitted on this bill illustrate a much stronger opposition to the bridge.
- > Preservation of the natural state of this section of river is a statewide concern, and should not be decided based on the wishes of a few residents who live on the east side of the river.

> The desire to provide easier access to forest service trails from the east side of the river should be weighed against the disruption to people already using those trails for recreation with dogs off-leash. For many, walking, running and biking with their dogs is their preferred form of recreation, and this is the only convenient section of river trail that they can use year around.

> Just because Bend Parks and Recreation has included the completion of the Deschutes River Trail in their master plan for years doesn't compel the building of a bridge at this location, nor any location for that matter. There are other reasonable ways to complete the trail.

Thank you for taking my comments.

Bruce A Johnson
1910 NW Hill Point Drive
Bend, Oregon 97703
brucej331@gmail.com