



ORCA: Oregon Coast Alliance

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Protecting the Oregon Coast

March 4, 2015

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Natural Resources Subcommittee
Oregon State Legislature
Salem, OR

Sent via email: WaysandMeans.NaturalResourcesSub@state.or.us

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Richard Devlin and Representative Dan Rayfield,
and Members of the Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee,

Oregon Coast Alliance is an Oregon nonprofit corporation whose mission is to protect and restore coastal natural resources and work with coastal residents for livable communities.

About half of the Oregon coast is protected in State Parks, and the coastal parks are one of Oregon's crown jewels. It is very important that OPRD have flexibility in their budget to purchase potential parklands when the properties become available. There is only a finite amount of coastal property, and it is critical that Parks be able to acquire desirable properties to expand public access and coastal experience. The coastal parks in particular receive millions of visitors each year.

Sometimes the opportunity to purchase a highly desirable property come up very quickly, and OPRD must be able to meet the landowner's deadline. The recent 2014 purchase of the Beltz property on the coast is the perfect example. The owner had a very tight timeline; OPRD had desired that parcel for thirty years, and was able to acquire it in short order because they had budget flexibility.

Apart from maintaining the opportunity for new purchases, OPRD needs to concentrate on the large backlog of maintenance. This, too, is a need highlighted by the heavily used coastal parks.

Financial stability is important for OPRD, but it should not come at the expense of the parks themselves. OPRD Director van Laanen was quoted in the *Statesman-Journal* on March 2, "If we have a park that's under-utilized, we want to ask if there's something

different we can do that would create revenue. Maybe that is a zip line, or an adrenaline park, large social events, fun runs or more mountain biking.”

ORCA is concerned about this trend, because most parks, especially on the coast, are not “underused.” Some have more visitors and some less, but parks vary in the experiences they offer. This is intentional. Some parks are designed to, and created for, more solitary experiences. Many parks contain acreage little used by visitors but extremely important as habitat and ecological protection.

Commercializing parks is, in general, a very questionable idea; there are more than enough commercially-oriented recreation opportunities in the state. Park commercialization is a short-term solution that creates longterm difficulties, and would only be undertaken in this instance because of a current fluctuation in OPRD revenues. It is unwise to create major problems, and permanently change the nature of treasured parks, because of a temporary downturn. ORCA would not support such a decisive change in OPRD policy.

Selling off parcels that *appear* to be underused to local governments is also rarely a good option, as local governments have even fewer resources to devote to a parks system than the state does. Transferring lands to private owners, if and when other restrictions on the property in question allows such a transfer, is even less appropriate as a public policy matter, and ORCA would not support that as a new agency direction either.

ORCA would be pleased to work with OPRD on exploring new funding opportunities that would not damage the integrity of the cherished Parks system. OPRD might, for example, benefit from an interim task force or similar committee to explore funding options that would not compromise parks and the varied experiences they provide. ORCA hopes the Ways and Means Committee will be sensitive and flexible in exploring a delicate, workable balance for OPRD funding in the future that protects Oregon’s parks.

Please enter this testimony into the record on this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Cameron La Follette

Cameron La Follette
Executive Director