



Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation

Informational Testimony

February 21, 2019

The Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 3350 on July 5, 2017 and Governor Kate Brown signed it into law August 8, 2017 creating the *Office of Outdoor Recreation* as a new division within the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. The mission of the Office is to enhance the personal, community and economic benefits of outdoor recreation for all Oregonians. Since being hired during the summer of 2018, I've begun working to coordinate the state's outdoor recreation policy across agencies, between public and private sectors, and in cooperation with organizations that have a vested interest in seeing Oregon's outdoor recreation reach its fullest potential in every corner of the state. Enabling legislation makes clear that supporting and growing the outdoor sector is the North Star for this office, with supporting goals to improve outdoor recreation opportunities, quality of life in communities across the state, and maximize public and private investment in the outdoor recreation sector.

The Office is working to accomplish this by:

- Engaging public and private sector members to advise on recreation policy
- Developing into a communication forum and information clearinghouse on outdoor recreation economics, social benefits, and resource stewardship.
- Elevating outdoor recreation investment and policy alignment by collaborating with lead Oregon agencies like Travel Oregon, Business Oregon, Marine Board, Fish and Wildlife, Forestry, Transportation, plus federal and local governments as well as the outdoor industry.

Goals in the first 12 months:

- 1) Establish advisory group and broader collaboration network.
- 2) Develop prioritized hotlist of top policy or statutory barriers to outdoor recreation success.
- 3) Consider need and mechanism for outdoor donation fund.
- 4) Cooperate with Travel Oregon on economic contribution study measuring jobs, spending and tax revenue generated by outdoor recreation down to the county level.

- 5) Survey existing state programs – including business support and workforce development – that serve outdoor businesses and propose improvements.
- 6) Advance efforts highlighting the health benefits of outdoor recreation and related policy.
- 7) Develop an outdoor recreation sector directory.

Current activities:

When the Legislature formed the Office of Outdoor Recreation it placed Oregon in the company of a leading group of states spread across the nation that have similarly elected to elevate outdoor recreation to statewide importance.

Each state, now numbering a dozen, has chosen a slightly different tack to improve participation and access, investment and economic benefits, and resource stewardship. These differences are driven by each state's social and physical environment, but we have a shared foundation covering issues like access, resource protection, business development, education and workforce training, and inclusion. Oregon representatives - agencies, nonprofits, businesses, First Gentleman Dan Little – were part of a delegation to draft this shared platform, which was codified in signing the Confluence Accords in July of 2018. I have a copies here I would gladly share with the Commission.

Just this week, Governor Kate Brown announced the Governor's Task Force on the Outdoors to develop a strategic plan and set of recommendations to guide this work. Once nominations are advanced by agencies, majority and minority parties of legislature, and with non-profit and industry participation, the group will be seated by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission and have one year to deliver its plan back to the legislature and Governor.

I am also working in partnership with Travel Oregon and Oregon State University to put on the first Oregon Outdoor Recreation Summit in May of this year. The themes of economic development, access, inclusion, wellness, and workforce development are all on the agenda for what we hope will become the annual gathering for the outdoor sector.

With your permission, I would also briefly like to address a couple of policy items the committee is considering today. The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department has no position on Senate Bill 448, but welcomes to discuss the relationship between the

proposed statute and the work of the Office of Outdoor Recreation. First, it has been a common refrain from members of the recreating public that the system of passes and permits required to get outdoors in Oregon is overly complex and confusing, and I've had individuals express enthusiasm for anything that would simplify that system. A separate issue I have heard a lot about early on is that the growing popularity of outdoor recreation is placing a heavy strain on volunteer first responders, public safety officers, and Sheriff's offices. Just as one brief example, the number of Search and Rescue operations has grown by 30% over the last decade, and 98% of people needing assistance are not residents of the county in which they require help. Both the topics of recreation passes and SAR operations are the type of cross-cutting outdoor recreation policies this Office was designed to work on, and with the direction of the legislature I would be happy to facilitate conversations with stakeholders on potential solutions, including through an in-session workgroup on SAR if you feel it is appropriate.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this update.

Regards,

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