



March 18, 2019

House Committee On Natural Resources

Chair Representative Witt, Co-Vice Chairs Representative Gorsek, Representative Sprenger, Members of the Committee.

900 Court Street NE

Salem, Oregon 97301

**RE: SUPPORT FOR HB 2835**

Chair Witt, Co-Vice Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the approximately 3,000 Oregon members and supporters of American Whitewater, I am writing to encourage the Committee's support and passage of HB 2835 to protect and preserve public waterway access in Oregon.

Oregon is renowned for its plentiful water supplies and outstanding recreation opportunities on its public waterways. The abundance of outstanding water resources is a reason why people continue to live, work, recreate and travel to the state. Protecting rivers and access to them is important to conservation and recreation as it ties to strong local economies and community health.

Oregon House Bill 2835 started as an ambitious effort to address some of the access concerns in Oregon, and in an ongoing and collaborative effort has been modified in a process involving the many diverse stakeholders in the state with a vested interest in use of Oregon's waterways. Amendments have been carefully and collaboratively crafted to achieve some important outcomes that protect access to public waterways in the state, while still allowing for continued efforts for collaboration on some of the more complex, and early components of the bill.

It is important to support the passage of the amended bill to achieve certain improvements to waterway access in the state and achieves protections and preservations to waterway access for recreation in the state by:

- Creating a required public process where state land and waterway agencies would be required to engage in a public review process for any public waterway access closures greater than 30 days in length. The legislation allows for exceptions for emergencies such as wildfire and for critical wildlife and ecological management activities, as well as for short-term construction and/or site improvement related closures.
- Requiring that state agencies work in cooperation to produce a report each year that is available to the public, reporting the number of waterway access sites that have been closed to access by state agencies in the previous calendar year and the reasons for each closure; as well as providing the number of public access sites for recreational use of public waterways that have been opened by state agencies in the previous calendar year.
- Finally, the legislation seeks to enhance public access to public waterways by incorporating a feasibility assessment for waterway access integration into new state bridge construction or reconstruction projects. This would not require the retroactive review of existing state bridges, nor require a state agency to fund the construction of access to a waterway, and would encourage interagency coordination on access projects where access improvements are suitable.

Protecting rivers and the public's right to access public waterways is increasingly important. Many of our most iconic fish and wildlife species are dependent on rivers, and opportunities to enjoy healthy rivers directly support Oregon's growing \$16.4 billion dollar outdoor recreation economy - an industry that sustains 172,000 jobs, \$5.1 billion in wages and salaries, and \$749 million in local and state tax revenues - nearly three times the jobs (172,000) as the wood products industry (58,000) in Oregon. Public lands and waterways are the backbone of our rapidly growing outdoor industry, and without access to these resources, the industry could not thrive as it does today. Communities across Oregon recognize that outdoor recreation supports health, contributes to a high quality of life and—perhaps most importantly—attracts and sustains employers and families. Investing in outdoor infrastructure and access attracts employers and active workforces, ensuring that those communities thrive economically and socially.

American Whitewater has been involved in access legislation in Oregon since the early 2000's, and has been a primary advocate to attest that Oregon's rivers provide a high quality of life for its citizens as well as serve a vital part of the state's tourism industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2835.

Sincerely,

*Tom O'Keefe*

*Thomas O'Keefe, PhD*

**Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director - American Whitewater**

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