



Audubon Society of Portland
Bridgeton Neighborhood Assn.
City of Fairview
City of Gresham
City of Portland
Bureau of Environmental Services
Bureau of Transportation
Portland Parks & Recreation
Portland Water Bureau
City of Troutdale
Columbia Corridor Association
Columbia Slough Watershed Council
East Columbia Neighborhood Assn.
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Jubitz Corporation
Metro
Multnomah County
Multnomah County Drainage District
Peninsula Drainage District #1
Peninsula Drainage District #2
Port of Portland
State of Oregon
Dept. of Environmental Quality
Dept. of Land Conservation & Development
Governor's Regional Solutions Team
US Army Corps of Engineers

May 21, 2019

Senate Committee on Environment & Natural Resources
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Senate Bill 431-A4

Chair Hass and Members of the Committee,

The 27-mile levee system running from North Portland through Gresham, Fairview, and Troutdale, reduces the risk of flooding for over 7,500 residents, 2,500 businesses, 59,000 jobs, and critical public infrastructure, habitat, and greenspaces.

Although the infrastructure is old and in need of major repairs, the four drainage districts responsible for maintaining the levee system can only fund basic operations and maintenance and are unable to improve the levee system to bring it up to current federal safety standards set by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012. As a result, FEMA certification of the levee system has expired, which means FEMA could revoke accreditation of the levees and remap the area as a 100-year floodplain at any time, which would have major economic consequences for the region and the State.

Over the last five years, the Levee Ready Columbia partnership has completed the first ever comprehensive geotechnical investigation of the levee system, which identified a number of deficiencies that will need to be addressed to recertify the levees, as well as a slate of other technical issues that will need to be remedied over the next twenty years. Through this work, the partners also identified that a long-term solution is needed to bring the levees up to modern standards and to ensure the infrastructure is adequately supported going forward.

Thanks to the leadership of the legislators whose districts include portions of the managed floodplain, we are able to present you with that long-term solution through Senate Bill 431. This legislation creates an Urban Flood Safety & Water Quality District in urban Multnomah County to simplify and modernize the management of the Columbia Corridor levee system. The Levee Ready Columbia partners have worked hard to reach consensus around each provision within the bill to deliver a proposal that is designed to meet long-term flood safety needs; allow for a more equitable distribution of costs based on services rendered and benefits received; move to a more

inclusive board selection process; and establish a connection between the management of the flood safety infrastructure and the health of the of natural landscape around it.

The SB431-A4 amendments before you today represent several minor technical fixes that include:

- Clarifying the definition of green infrastructure in Section 2(5) per recommendations from the Audubon Society and the Oregon Water Resources Department;
- Addressing that the “managed floodplain” will not yet have formal boundaries, which will be established by the district board per Section 7(10). As such, small fixes were needed in Section 5(m)-(o) to tie the initial board appointments to the area encompassing the current drainage districts.
- Tightening up the language in Section 13(2) to ensure the board must obtain engineering plans for all works that require engineering;
- Further specifying where the district can conduct its works (Sections 15(1)(b)) and that all works must comply with federal, state, and local permitting and regulatory requirements and restrictions (Section 15(2));
- Adding “acquiring, purchasing,” and “improving” to the list district works in Sections 19(1) and 19(2) to ensure all costs associated with the districts’ responsibilities can be funded through service user charges and revenue bonds; and
- Inserting a debt limit to the General Obligation bond section of the bill (Section 20) per the recommendation of LRC’s Bond Counsel.

The Urban Flood Safety & Water Quality District is needed to reduce the risk of flooding in an area critical to the region’s future, to meet shifting federal standards, and to support the improvement of the environmental value of the managed floodplain.

Additionally, we have an important opportunity to secure significant federal funding for the levee system as the US Army Corps of Engineers completes a federally-authorized study that will culminate with recommendations to Congress to make the system more resilient. USACE’s recommendations will be delivered with a funding requests to complete up to 65% of the work they’ve recommended. We must move quickly to put a modernized governance structure in place to be able to fully leverage this opportunity and thereby reduce the capital improvement costs that must be borne by Oregonians.

Although there is always some risk with change, doing nothing presents a far greater risk to the state, the region, and all the people who rely on the levee system to protect their lives and livelihoods. We ask to you to stand with Levee Ready Columbia, and all the people who rely on the Columbia River levee system, by voting yes on Senate Bill 431.

Sincerely,

The Levee Ready Columbia partnership