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mckenziesd.org



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March 29th, 2021
RE: SB 745

Dear Esteemed Members of the Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery,

I am writing to you in support of SB 745. I am writing to you as the Superintendent/Principal of McKenzie School District, I am also writing to you as someone who grew up in McKenzie Bridge and spent a great deal of my formative years in Blue River, where my mother worked. I have had a front row seat to the decline of rural Lane County during the federal timber slowdown of the 1980's and 90's. I have also seen the lack of investment in rural Oregon as timber was never replaced with a viable industry beyond tourism. As a child, that meant friends moving away, businesses closing, and fewer options. As a school teacher and administrator that meant fewer students, smaller budgets and having to make do with less.

Beyond the lack of a viable industry, the McKenzie Valley and Blue River were left without a mechanism to develop and thrive on its own accord as there is no local government for the rural hamlets that line the valley. Although put in place to protect the beauty of rural Oregon, the reason why so many of us choose to live and work here, State and County regulations make development very difficult. These are understandable protections when trying to keep farmland viable or forest land pristine, but extremely limiting when trying to keep a community that is already in place a vibrant place to grow up, raise a family and contribute to the economy.

SB 745 is a good starting place to help a community bounce back by allowing the local Water Board to regulate waste water. The lack of waste water treatment has long been identified as a limiting factor to the success of Blue River. In more recent years, it has become clear that the dependence on aging septic tanks are endangering the McKenzie River, the source of Eugene/Springfield's drinking water. This bill impacts much of the lower Willamette Valley, not just the residents of Blue River. By providing an avenue to address this need, you will give our community a chance to re-emerge from the Holiday Farm Fire stronger and with a chance to reverse the many years of disinvestment to take the first steps in restoring a vibrant community.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "N. Lane Tompkins", written over a white background.

N. Lane Tompkins
Superintendent/Principal
McKenzie School District
McKenzie River Community School