

April 21, 2021

Joint Ways and Means Committee  
Letter in Support of the McKenzie River Discovery Center

Dear Committee Members:

I wasn't born on the McKenzie River but I got here as soon as I could. I had the opportunity to live on the river while I was finishing college in 1977 and have lived on the McKenzie and/or owned property here since that time. My wife and I have been full time residents for the last 15 years and have owned the Wayfarer Resort since 2008. We are currently living in Eugene as survivors of the Holiday Farm Fire. I have been a wood boat enthusiast for over forty years and from the first time I experienced the McKenzie I knew there was a special story to tell. That story is more compelling now than ever.

The importance of the McKenzie River to the overall health of the Willamette Valley watershed cannot be overstated. Thirty percent of the summer volume of the Willamette River in Portland is from the McKenzie. The importance here being the cooling influence of that water for the survival of the endangered Chinook Salmon. It is also the sole source of drinking water for the City of Eugene. The story of the river is multi-faceted, from the incredible geology/hydrology of the river, the story of the fish of the river, the history of guiding on the river and on other major rivers of the northwest ( the McKenzie River Guides Association was formed in 1931), the development of the McKenzie wooden driftboats and the importance of the river to pre-colonial inhabitants of Oregon. Interest in the McKenzie is growing. In 2019 according to the USFS the 5 mile round trip hike to Blue Pool/Tamolitch Falls had close to 50,000 visitors.

The McKenzie River Discovery Center located in the Old McKenzie Fish Hatchery ( a state designated historic site) is a story long in the making with significant recent success. A capacity grant from the Murdock Foundation is funding a large portion of our outstanding Executive Director Wisteria Stewart's salary for three years. A solid and growing board of directors, collaboration with community and government agencies in disaster response, collaboration with the US Forest Service/ OSU in development of educational programs and a growing list of donors and other success in grant writing are pointing us in the right direction.

I am the president of a small non-profit foundation The McKenzie Masters Foundation. Because of it's close alignment to our mission: to support projects that benefit the general public of the communities of the McKenzie River Watershed and to educate the general public in order to increase the public's awareness, understanding and appreciation of the value and natural resources of the McKenzie River, the MRDC has become one of our top funding priorities the last four years. We have donated close to \$20,000 to them over that period of time.

The success of the Discovery Center is dependent on a diverse group of donors however: individuals, foundations and local and state governments. Lane County has already made significant commitments to the Center. The Center will play important roles in nurturing the McKenzie's recovery as well as inspire future stewards of this unique river. I believe it is well worth an investment of American Recovery funds.

Sincerely,

Andy McWilliams  
Board Member McKenzie River Discovery Center  
The Wayfarer Resort & The McKenzie Masters Foundation