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April 22, 2021

Oregon Joint Legislative Session
Re: Expenditure of 2021 American Rescue Plan Funds

I'm writing in support of the McKenzie River Discovery Center's (MRDC) interpretive facility development project. I believe completion of this project would boost public awareness of the rich cultural and current resources along our 'Sixty-mile Main Street,' which travels through this area's nine small, unincorporated rural communities.

Two projects of a long-range "three legged" plan to strengthen those communities have been completed - construction of over a dozen large community signs and designation of Hwy. 126 as a state Scenic Byway. The MRDC project is the final leg of that plan.

As the area's weekly newspaper for over 43 years, McKenzie River Reflections is a small business that supports outdoor recreation, travel, and tourism. We've heard strong support for the MRDC from both our local business owners and community members.

I myself have been involved with this project for several decades, beginning in the late 1990's when I was appointed to a Lane County task force that recommended preserving the site's buildings. I have continued to serve on the MRDC site's board of directors as well on the board of the McKenzie River Chamber of Commerce.

The pressures of the coronavirus pandemic and the Holiday Farm Fire made 2020 a very stressful year. Realization of the McKenzie River Discovery Center project will increase appreciation for, and awareness of, this beautiful watershed's resources. I believe it will also pique visitors' curiosity to learn more about the area - and encourage them to do things like explore our natural wonders, drift or raft the river, and take a trek into the wilderness to enjoy our ancient forests and waterfalls.

The physical presence of the Discovery Center will help draw people to the area and hopefully encourage them to stop and stay - rather than just travel through. I strongly feel the Discovery Center will become a symbol of pride to McKenzie residents and businesses, as well as visitors who see it.

Construction of the McKenzie River Discovery Center will help send the message that the McKenzie Valley area remains vibrant, and will show Oregon's commitment to community recovery efforts and "Building back better."

I sincerely hope Oregon's legislators will share my belief in the many positive outcomes that will result from construction of the McKenzie River Discovery Center Interpretive Center, and vote to allocate funds to support those efforts.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Engelman".

- Ken Engelman
Publisher