



TO: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

FROM: Quinn Read, Center for Biological Diversity & Danielle Moser, Oregon Wild

DATE: February 11, 2021

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2171 with -2 Amendments – Making the Outdoors Accessible to All

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On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity and Oregon Wild, we respectfully submit the following comments in support of HB 2171 with its -2 amendments, which takes several steps to make Oregon’s outdoor recreational opportunities accessible to all. The Center works to secure a future for all species, great and small, hovering on the brink of extinction. Oregon Wild works to protect and restore Oregon’s wildlands, wildlife, and waters as an enduring legacy for future generations. We believe that human welfare is deeply linked to nature and that all Oregonians should have the opportunity to experience our state’s famous “outdoor life” and benefit from a deeper connection to nature.

Oregon is synonymous with its outdoor recreation opportunities – people travel here or even move here permanently to take part in our state’s outdoor life – but not everyone in Oregon gets to benefit from those opportunities. While the majority of Oregonians participate in some form of outdoor activity each year, incredibly small percentages of people of color engage in outdoor recreation. Elevating access to outdoor recreation in every corner of Oregon is key to achieving the well-being of residents and visitors, enhancing economic development and protecting our natural resources.

HB 2171 with its -2 amendments take some important steps to increase access to outdoor recreation across the state. We strongly support the provisions of the bill that reinstate funding and remove the sunset clause for the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF). Since its establishment in 2019, the OCRF – administered an advisory committee and overseen by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife – has provided critical funding to community-led and grassroots groups, thereby empowering them to develop and implement local solutions to address conservation and recreation needs in their communities.

The OCRF was established with the expectation that private fundraising would be matched by \$1 million of General Fund dollars. When those matching funds were removed during the 2020 legislative session, the OCRF was left with only those funds that could be raised from private donors. Long-term success for this important program requires investment from the state. We believe the OCRF should be made permanent. Likewise, we believe the \$ 1 million match in General Fund dollars should be reinstated to ensure the fund can continue to support community-led conservation, stewardship, and recreation initiatives.

We also support provisions of the bill that increase investment in the Office of Outdoor Recreation. We particularly support the creation of an advisory committee with membership that reflects Oregon's rapidly changing demographics. We believe it is critical that our state's boards, commissions and advisory bodies include representation from those whose voices have been historically suppressed and marginalized by our systems and institutions.

We believe the advisory committee should have a clear role in guiding policy for the Office of Outdoor Recreation – including in the development of the proposed action plan to advance access for diverse populations to state parks and trails, including increasing access for differently-abled people. One recommendation from the Governor's Racial Justice Council Environmental Equity Committee was to establish a grant program to help benefit recreation engagement for underserved communities and enhance safe and comfortable outdoor tourism experiences. We are excited about this possibility and believe the advisory committee should have a well-defined role in determining how any eventual grant funds are spent.

Finally, we support formalizing the existing relationship between the OCRF and the Office of Outdoor Recreation, wherein the Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation will serve as a non-voting member on OCRF's Advisory Committee. This relationship fosters communication between the two bodies and opens up the possibility of future strategic collaborations in making outdoor opportunities accessible to all Oregonians.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns. You can reach Quinn Read at [qread@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:qread@biologicaldiversity.org) and Danielle Moser at [dm@oregonwild.org](mailto:dm@oregonwild.org).