



February 10, 2021

Sen. Kathleen Taylor and Rep. Jeff Reardon, Co-Chairs  
And Members of the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
Oregon Legislature  
State Capitol Building

Via Email

Re: HB 5025, Budget of the Parks and Recreation Department

Dear Natural Resources Subcommittee Co-Chairs and Members,

Oregon Coast Alliance (ORCA) is an Oregon nonprofit corporation whose mission is to protect coastal natural resources and work with residents to strengthen community livability. We write you today concerning the budget for the Parks and Recreation Department.

OPRD is the agency that manages the state parks that make up a little more than half of the Oregon coastline. These parks are, as has often been said, Oregon's crown jewel: the most heavily visited by state residents, and very popular with out-of-state visitors as well. Yet OPRD now faces unprecedented challenges and unhappy choices, as revenues from lottery funds plummeted during this past year of public health restrictions at the same time the number of visitors to the coast sharply increased.

OPRD has long been in a vulnerable situation, since the Legislature removed general fund monies from the OPRD budget subsequent to Measure 66 and then 76, which gave the agency money from the lottery. Increasing visitorship year round, a large and growing backlog of maintenance projects, the need to have money available to take advantage of real estate opportunities, and new free access programs all lowered the resilience of the OPRD budget, even before the disasters of 2020.

Climate change stresses are also beginning to noticeably add additional burdens to the maintenance backlog, contributing increased erosion of shorelines and more severe storms that batter coastal infrastructure.

Specific comments on the OPRD budget as follows:

1. HB 2125 would grant OPRD the opportunity to sell up to \$100 million in bonds. But that is an illusory and temporary stretch of the available dollars, as bonds have debt service and require repayment.
2. OPRD has suffered greatly from the 2020 drastic budget losses, and corresponding staff cuts, to beach rangers and other on-the-ground personnel in the coastal region. Yet it is precisely these parks where visitors are many and increasing, and rangers are needed to curb inappropriate or dangerous activities, such as beach driving or climbing over fences (as some visitors regularly do, despite the great peril).
3. ORCA supports **HB 2672**, which would create the Ocean Beach Fund out of transient lodging tax revenues from state recreation area lodgings along the ocean shore. The bill would require OPRD to use the money to manage the coastal state parks, and would create a stable source of much-needed funding to help keep personnel maintaining and overseeing this most heavily used part of the system.
4. OPRD needs to have money available to respond to opportunities to purchase publicly important properties that come up for sale. We request the Legislature to ensure that the agency had the fiscal flexibility it needs to pursue the chances to purchase lands for the public benefit.
5. The State Scenic Waterways program is an important one that lay dormant for years before being re-energized in the last few years. OPRD needs to pick up on this program again for its benefit to Oregonians of all ages, both residents and visitors.
6. The plummeting lottery revenues from 2020 will likely extend into 2021 until restaurants (where many, if not most, lottery tickets are purchased) are once again free to function. The Legislature probably already needs to, and may in future need to continue, temporarily support the agency until lottery revenues recover. Already OPRD cannot maintain even a basic infrastructure presence in the coastal region during the heavy summer use season. This cannot be allowed to continue another year as it did in summer of 2020.

ORCA, as well as residents and the many Oregonians who visit the coast, treasure the coast's beauty. We trust the Legislature will meet the need of the Department to help keep its critically valuable programs and trusted staff in place and give the agency a chance to recover its funding base without sacrificing the state's parks – and, especially, our famed, and much loved, coastal parks.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Cameron La Follette*

Cameron La Follette  
Executive Director