

COMMENTS REGARDING HB 3124, particularly item 5-4

Dear House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

My name is Karl Wenner and I am the volunteer chair of the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee. I am here today to inform you about the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and its unique ability to address drought and water security in Oregon. The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund was created by the Oregon Legislature in 2019. In our short life we have funded over 100 projects across the state satisfying our dual mandate to implement the Oregon Conservation Strategy as well as to improve access to the outdoors for all Oregonians. We have become a very successful and popular program. This is demonstrated by the fact that we have received over \$1.4 million dollars in private donations from over 20,000 individual Oregonians, businesses, and foundations. In addition, we have a strong coalition of over 100 organizations to help us carry out our work.

Our success is driven by our focus on working with our partners at the local level, helping them address their issues in an inclusive and locally driven manner, but in such a way that it can lead to landscape scale solutions.

In the last biennium, the legislature awarded us \$4 million dollars as part of the drought package. We have been able to deploy those funds throughout the state, choosing projects by reviewing the applications through the lens of drought mitigation.

For example, we funded several low tech process based restoration projects on our rivers and streams. This cost-effective method restores riparian areas and historic hydrology in a way that maximizes fish and wildlife habitat while at the same time improving ground water recharge, raising water tables, and normalizing stream flows. It is thought that this style of restoration represents one of the best opportunities the state has to mitigate drought and climate change and we have embraced it whole heartedly.

We have funded many other drought related projects and we have shown that the OCRF can deploy funds and get projects implemented on the ground in a very short time frame.

With the structure we have built within the fund, and having such a strong coalition, we are well positioned to help the legislature achieve drought relief and water security for the state.

We are slated in the draft framework for this bill under section 5-4 to receive funding to continue our drought focused program. I am here to affirm that we are ready and able to assist you in achieving the goals of HB 3124.