



Oakridge Trails Alliance

Serving the Middle Fork Ranger District in the Willamette National Forest

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February 15, 2023

Senate Committee on Judiciary
900 Court Street NE Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: SB 754 Recreational Liability Reform

Chair Prozanski and Members of the Committee:

Oakridge Trails Alliance is a 501-c-3 trails stewardship organization of the Middle Fork Ranger District in the Willamette National Forest. We have been operating volunteer trail building and maintenance projects in the Middle Fork Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest since 2018, along with outdoor recreational social gatherings and fundraisers, that require participants to understand the inherent risks and importance of personal responsibility as part of participating in a safe and enjoyable experience.

The value of our organization offers a critical element of protection for our local community's welfare and economic health where climate change has impeded safe access to trails damaged by wildfire, unexpected precipitation, and heavy user traffic when trails are closed and lack of disbursement funnels recreation use to the remaining open recreational opportunities. In partnership with other trails groups and local land managers, our volunteers have been able to respond to these events, effectively helping to address impacts detrimentally affecting user experiences across the district, and preventing further damage to public trails resources. The rising costs of equipment, supplies, and insurance have created an unnecessary burden for our organization to continue providing these services.

Liability waivers are an important tool for our organization to operate under cost-effective means. They allow us to emphasize the importance of understanding inherent risks and enforce the individual responsibility of each participant to be accountable for following safety standards and procedures, including those our organization deems appropriate above and beyond those required by our partnering land managers. Ultimately, it is critical that our volunteers take personal responsibility and be accountable for following these standards. This is important whether our constituents are volunteering to build and/or maintain trails, or participate in activities such as hiking or mountain biking as another aspect of our organizational offerings.

Please consider supporting SB 754 as a critical step forward protecting safe and accessible recreation experiences, helping maintain public lands volunteer stewardship efforts, and strengthening Oregon's recreational economy, especially where rural communities are dependent on outdoor tourism.

Sincerely,

Matt McPharlin

Matt McPharlin, President

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