

Submitter: Elaine Stewart

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3173

I am writing in support of HB 3173, providing stable funding for Oregon Flora Project (OFP). It is an important and essential resource for natural resource conservation in Oregon. For more than 20 years, I worked as a restoration ecologist caring for natural areas in the lower Willamette Valley. OFP was critical to my success. I consulted the Flora, in print and online form, multiple times every week in my job. Having access to an authoritative reference on what is native and not native to Oregon is necessary to recognize and respond to invasive plant infestations that threaten not only native biodiversity but can spill over to agricultural and forest lands and become economic problems for our farmers and foresters. Being able to correctly identify plant species is the crucial first step in knowing the conservation issues present in natural areas, whether it be occurrences of threatened and endangered plants, imminent threats from invasive plants, locating First Foods resources for partnership with Indigenous people, or finding healthy populations of native flora for which seed could be collected for habitat restoration elsewhere. OFP supports all of these tasks.

Since retiring, I am very active in the Backyard Habitat program in the Portland area. OFP is a wonderful resource to share with new habitat enthusiasts, and I link to it regularly when responding to inquiries about native plants on the local group's social media page. The photograph galleries for species are great teaching tools and help people understand the written descriptions. The website section on gardening with natives provides information and advice. Similar sites for California and Washington lack the utility and specificity of OFP.

OFP has lacked sufficient funding for years, which slowed the progress of the third and final volume of Flora of Oregon and limited work on the website. Considering its fundamental importance to natural resource management in a state with economically important agriculture and forestry, this needs to be rectified. I urge you to find funding for OFP and make it stable.

A final note: I read a letter in opposition to the bill based on concerns that making the locations of rare plant occurrences could put them at risk. If the bill's current language would remove OFP's existing ability to blur exact locations as needed, I support changes to the language that would preserve OFP's ability to restrict access to specific locations of rare plants as they see fit.