

February 3, 2025

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Re: HB 3173 (Oregon Flora) - SUPPORT

Dear Committee members,

I have spent many years gaining familiarity with and advocating for Oregon's native plants: I studied plant taxonomy at Portland State, and earned a PhD in the subject from Oregon State. I have been active in the Native Plant Society of Oregon, serving in leadership roles. I have given previous testimony to this committee on topics related to the flora of Oregon.

So, in many ways, my **support of HB 3173** is personal. It recognizes the importance of maintaining our knowledge of this natural resource, and provides security for an organization I have relied on for many years.

However, for this testimony, I'd like to focus more on what OregonFlora brings to the whole state.

I have been asked to author a portion of the upcoming Volume 3 of the Flora of Oregon, the chapter on the primrose family, and this has provided the opportunity to dive deep into the resources OregonFlora provides. It is amazing to me the wealth of information OregonFlora provides, at no cost, to the people of Oregon about the natural world around them.

The fundamental backbone of OregonFlora is the herbarium at Oregon State University: a museum of dried plant specimens collected from Oregon and the region since the mid-1800s. This museum provides the raw data that gives us our knowledge—current and historic—of what plants grow where in our state.

This information belongs to the people of Oregon, and OregonFlora is the only resource that makes it available and accessible to anyone.

While studying at OSU I had the good fortune to work at the herbarium; that resource was at my fingertips. Most cannot make the trip to Corvallis to check a plant ID, or have the training to make it useful.

The rancher needing to know what the livestock have eaten,
the farmer investigating a new weed in the field,
the land manager checking if they have an exotic invader or a rare native,
the gardener wanting to purchase a native for their pollinator garden and
the nursery owner checking that their stock is “actually the Oregon species,”
the teacher learning what plants they may see on a school hike, and
the child learning the rich heritage and abundance of our state;

All these Oregonians, and more, can find the useful information they need from OregonFlora.

OregonFlora provides this resource on a very modest budget. Indeed, it's difficult for me to think of another program that has such a wide-ranging impact for such a reasonable investment. Still, the program has at times had to reduce staffing, and the stability that this bill provides will allow them to focus instead on their core mission, "to increase awareness and knowledge of the plants of Oregon through publication of technically sound, accessible information for diverse audiences."

I urge you to support HB 3173 to ensure the resources of OregonFlora can continue to be maintained and developed for users statewide.

Sincerely,

Kevin Weitemier, PhD
Portland, OR