Support for Oregon Flora Program

From: Dr. Jeffrey Miller, Citizen Scientist and Professor Emeritus, Oregon State University

I am writing in support of HB 3173.

My profession. My career as a Professor at Oregon State University began in 1979 in the Department of Entomology and culminated with my retirement in 2015 while serving in the Department of Horticulture. My expertise includes biological control of agricultural insect pests and insect ecology/taxonomy in general. My publications and teachings have always included insect-botanical relationships. I was the lead author in the chapter entitled "Insects As Plant Taxonomists" included in Flora Of Oregon, vol.2.

My connection to the Oregon Flora Program. I continue as an active researcher/author to this day. Currently, I am writing "An Atlas Of Oregon's Butterflies", a tome relying heavily on information available to me through the Oregon Flora website, information that I cannot acquire from any other source. For example: 1) I require latitude-longitude coordinates for mapping the foodplants of butterflies, 2) rapid screening of prefabricated plant maps are essential to my efficiency and accuracy, 3) the multiple search venues, such as phylogeny and nomenclature allow me to connect the dots of evolutionary history, 4) the 'Polygon' site-specific tool is a unique software program that provides very useful data from a massive database that offers incredible insights into the complexity of species-location information. The leadership and staff at the current Oregon Flora Program have generously given me scarce bits of their time to help me solve multiple mapping and taxonomic issues. These resources and services available through the Oregon Flora Program are a big part of what makes Oregon a stand-out State in the field of Botany.

My hope for the future of the Oregon Flora Program. All of the services that can, and should be, provided by a Program, such as The Oregon Flora, depend on data input and data output. Much of the data are numerical in form and housed within the bodies of huge digital databases (plural!). The entering of data is conducted behind the scenes and requires a serious commitment to keep current. Also, the data may be visual in the context of prefabricated maps and images of plants and their diagnostics features for identification, again a huge database is required. The data output must be user-friendly, period. To date, I have found the interaction between my keyboard and the online Program interface refreshingly smooth. While the Oregon Flora Program has performed admirably on the aforementioned points funds are the basis for continued success and such funds are required on a recurring basis in order to perform long-term tasks, establish long-term tactics, execute long-term strategies, and achieve long-term objectives.

My final comment is relevant to the current enthusiasm expressed by the public to become active in what we professorial types like to call Citizen Science. The previous involvement of volunteers through their donation of time, information, and money is strong testimony to the attraction that is the Oregon Flora Program. Over many decades the contributions of field images of plants to the Oregon Flora website is testimony to the popularity of documenting plant species in their natural habitats. Recently the online platform known as iNaturalist has become extremely popular as a photograph-based site for scientists and amateurs alike. The catch is that participation by the public, involving many thousands of individuals, in the iNaturalist 'movement' depends on the availability of sound, fundamental facts so the Citizen Scientist can be confident and empowered to share their discoveries. Here, the pride gained by Citizen Scientists through self-teaching, and involvement in contibuting to knowledge about the biological World, is what the Oregon Flora Program is. The whole point of improving bio-literacy, not only in Oregon, boils down to having access to the best source of sound and fundamental facts regarding Oregon's plant life and in that context the public and the scientific community are very well-served by the Oregon Flora Program.