

Submitter: Theodora Jaster

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3173

Dear Committee members,

As a resident of Eugene, I hereby express my whole-hearted support for HB 3173. Several years ago, I was working as a field botanist in south central Oregon. I had to use a variety of plant identification manuals to do my job and none of them had a full set of the species of that region. For this reason, it was actually impossible to make a reliable identification of many of the species, especially those from more complex groups. I was new to Oregon at that time and wished there were a comprehensive plant identification manual ("Flora") for our state. Soon thereafter I discovered there was someone at Oregon State University working on just that. This was the founder of the OregonFlora program.

Finally, the first two volumes of this manual, Flora of Oregon, have been published and the third and final volume is well underway. In the meantime, a robust interactive website has been developed by OregonFlora, powered in large part by the information gathered to prepare Flora of Oregon. I use the distribution maps, field photos, and identification tools on a regular basis and have come to rely on them to identify plants. It's fun and engaging, but even more importantly the information is vetted, accurate, and reliable. This is the only resource (including the volumes and website) that offers this kind of comprehensive information for the whole state.

The program has been funded over the years by small grants and by the ongoing individual support of hundreds of Oregonians. People want these tools. The volumes are publicly available and the website is free. Yet OregonFlora has struggled to stay afloat. Last year the organization was on the brink of being shuttered. So many of us were very concerned that the final volume would not get finished and that the website would be taken down. How can land holders and state agencies make sound decisions about land management without tools that define the biodiversity of their regions? I feel we should have the right to understand the flora of our state. Additionally, OregonFlora provides an engaging and inviting portal for anyone to learn about our state's natural heritage. Who would be more appropriate to fund this than the state of Oregon itself?

Thank you for considering the passage of this bill. With your support this bill will be a boon to our citizens and the lands we occupy.

Sincerely, Theodora Jaster