

Submitter: Kieran Hanrahan

On Behalf Of:

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

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3173

Before today, you've likely never heard about OregonFlora. However, I'm sure you do know how important plants, and specifically native plants, are to the economy and identity of Oregon. Whether they're the trees harvested by the timber industry, shrubs that growers sell as landscaping plants, huckleberries that families pick in the summer, or wildflowers that hikers spend money in small town economies to visit, Oregon's native plants are the foundation of the economy in our state. Supporting OregonFlora is the best bang-for-your-buck investment the people of Oregon could possibly make in protecting that foundation.

You may be aware of some of the plant science that happens in Oregon. Perhaps you've heard of a study about the effects climate change may have on timber yields, or about efforts to conserve an endangered plant. What all this research has in common is that it relies on data—data that doesn't collect itself. It has to be gathered—painstakingly—by scientists over decades, preserved, and made accessible to researchers. For decades, the state's biggest repository of botanical data has lived in the OregonFlora program at Oregon State University, where it is available for free public use by individuals, governments, organizations, and businesses. The data at OregonFlora is critical to Oregonians as they decide what plants to grow, purchase, sell, harvest, and protect in the state.

OregonFlora is the only project like this in Oregon. Without it, plant science and the jobs that depend on it take a huge step backward. It's the most critical piece of infrastructure in Oregon's plant-dependent economy that you've never heard of. When a local weed control board needs to research a new invasive species that could harm crops or livestock, they turn to OregonFlora for information. When a grower is deciding what native landscape plants to produce and sell, they turn to OregonFlora for guidance. When a government agency needs to understand whether to list or de-list a species, they turn to OregonFlora for historical occurrence data. It is an essential tool.

Fortunately, preserving this critical infrastructure comes cheap! Restoring parcels land or protecting endangered species can cost tens of millions of dollars—but supporting OregonFlora for a year cost less than half a million dollars per biennium. The researchers at OregonFlora are able to run the program on a tight budget because they are cost-conscious, efficient, and proven scientists and public servants.

For decades, OregonFlora has barely squeaked by with the donations of individuals

and non-profit organizations. Now, it needs additional financial support to survive and continue to serve all Oregonians. OregonFlora's proposed biennial budget line item is a small amount, but an amount that is essential in protecting Oregon's native plants and growing Oregon's plant-dependent economy—which is to say, all of us.