



Southern Oregon

**LAND**  
CONSERVANCY

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

From: Steve Wise  
Executive Director  
Southern Oregon Land Conservancy

Re: Support for HB 2984

Dear Representatives Helm and Owens:

I am writing to offer the strong support of the Southern Oregon Land Conservancy for HB 2984 and its proposal to fund \$1.5 million through the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund to protect, maintain, or enhance fish and wildlife resources in Oregon.

Southern Oregon Land Conservancy (SOLC) is Oregon's first and oldest regional non-profit land trust, permanently protecting private and municipal lands to sustain their human and natural communities since 1978. Originally extending from coast to Oregon's eastern border, SOLC currently protects nearly 13,000 acres across 82 individual locations. Although we primarily focus on lands and communities in the Rogue River Basin in Jackson and Josephine County, our historic conservation easements also cover lands in Curry, Coos, Douglas, and Lake Counties.

Like others among the nearly 30 land trusts in the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts, SOLC has invested increasing attention and resources toward the importance of sharing access to the wonder and solace of the forests, grasslands, meadows, waterways and other landscapes we conserve. Organizing hikes, interpretive activities, youth field education, and volunteer stewardship activities on our preserves promotes their value in the minds of community members, building both the social commitment in succeeding generations that permanent land conservation requires, and helping to expand the conservation ethic and quality of life that are at the heart of Oregon's culture.

SOLC and our communities have benefitted significantly from Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund Support, in particular at our Harry and Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff. This iconic rock formation at the head of the Bear Creek Valley near Ashland, and its 55 surrounding acres of oak woodland and native bunchgrass meadows, became a conservation preserve by donation in 2021. But while the deceased landowner dedicated Pompadour Bluff to conservation, the area's infrastructure needed upgrades to support the recreation and education programs that would allow SOLC to safely share the area's inspiring ecology and breathtaking views with the public. An aging bridge across an irrigation ditch was vulnerable from unstable footings, unsafe for potential fire safety equipment or the school buses we envisioned crossing into the preserve. The former residential driveway lacked a parking area for visitors, or a safe turnaround for buses or emergency vehicles.



**Left:** An irrigation ditch bridge at SOLC's Harry and Marilyn Fisher Preserve at Pompadour Bluff, whose unstable footings would not support vehicles necessary for recreation, stewardship or fire safety. **Right:** The replacement pre-cast bridge with 60,000 pound capacity.

In two phased grants for infrastructure upgrades at the Pompadour Bluff Preserve, the OCRF came through. With OCRF grant funding, we installed a pre-cast concrete replacement bridge that proved its worth when Jackson County Fire District 5 brought equipment on site to clear away the former residence in a 'Burn to Learn' training exercise.



**Left:** Fire trucks stage near the replaced irrigation ditch bridge at Pompadour Bluff Preserve. **Right:** A water tanker truck used during the "Burn to Learn" training crossing the bridge to refill.

Matching funds designed and built the first trail to the commanding view at the top of the bluff. The first school bus, an advanced Environmental Studies class from the local high school, crossed the replaced bridge in Spring 2023 (below) and explored the forest using the new trail.



*Southern Oregon Land Conservancy HB 2984 Testimony*

Construction of a fire safe parking lot near the bridge, a second ORCF grant, is scheduled for Spring 2025. An informational kiosk on ecology, fire safety and cultural history will also accompany the parking area, making the preserve accessible and safe for recreational visitors and stewardship volunteers.

With land trusts in Oregon now managing more acreage than Oregon State Parks, investment in infrastructure for safe recreational and stewardship access is essential for our lands and conservation organizations to reach their full potential. The funding provided by HB 2984 will help groups like ours to engage our communities in conservation on private lands with exceptional natural values, and to provide safe, inspiring recreation to the public. Outdoor recreation is a foundational element of Oregon's economy, and of the conservation ethic that will sustain our uniquely diverse landscapes for the future. We urge the passage of this bill, and continued funding of the Oregon Conservation and Recreation fund.