



“Coming together for healthy forests and communities”

February 4, 2025

To: Chair John Lively & Members of the

House Committee on Climate, Energy, & the Environment

From: Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative

Subject: House Bill 2066

The Southern Willamette Forest Collaborative is writing to express support for HB2066 regarding the ownership, deployment, and use of microgrids and community microgrids. The City of Oakridge faces significant challenges with the current power infrastructure. The 4,500 residents of Oakridge, Westfir, and unincorporated Lane County rely entirely on a single power line provided by Lane Electric Co-op spans from the urban valley to the Cascade foothills with no backup power source or natural gas service. During winter storms, downed trees frequently cause power outages that impact both residents and businesses. This vulnerability has deterred numerous companies from relocating to Oakridge Industrial Park (OIP), limiting economic development opportunities.

The community has the unique potential for local energy generation with a connected microgrid that could address these challenges. Oakridge owns water rights on three rivers - Salmon Creek, Salt Creek, and the Willamette River - with potential for micro-hydro development. Oakridge-Westfir is surrounded by the Willamette National Forest and residues from timber harvests and fuels reduction could be utilized for community heat and power, instead of being burned on site as slash. Moreover, the City has documented geothermal resources from previous wells, and recent feasibility studies have confirmed solar as a viable option, particularly given its location with over 300 days of sun annually. Projects such as these could connect to critical infrastructure and the OIP.

A local microgrid in Oakridge would not only provide crucial backup power during outages but would also allow the community to tap into these natural resources for sustainable energy generation. This would help protect residents from power losses that threaten health and safety

during extreme weather, while also supporting local businesses and creating new economic opportunities.

The development of local microgrids aligns with the community and Lane County's goals for both energy resilience and economic development, as outlined in the City of Oakridge 2020-2025 Strategic Plan, the Lane County Climate Action Plan 2.0, and the Lane County Multi-Jurisdictional Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan. This initiative would help create living-wage jobs while sustainably developing local resources in a way that benefits both businesses and residents.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Sarah Altemus-Pope
SWS Executive Director
director@swfcollaborative.org
southwillamette.wixsite.com/swfc

Thank you, on behalf of the South Willamette Solutions Board of Directors/ SWFC Steering Committee:

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Professor, UO

Sue Cathcart

Willamette Mountain Mercantile

Kathy Holston

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D'Lynn Williams

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