



2-18-2025

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: North Coast Land Conservancy

RE: Support for Recreational Immunity Protections through S.B. 179

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Committee Members:

North Coast Land Conservancy works to protect ecologically and culturally significant habitats along the north Oregon Coast. Our efforts include maintaining miles of trails and ensuring public access to thousands of acres within our service area. We write today in strong support of S.B. 179, a bill that will preserve vital recreational immunity protections for public and private lands open to recreation.

As of 2023, Oregon had 90 land trust properties open for public use. The Oregon Public Use of Lands Act has historically encouraged landowners—both public and private—to provide recreational access by granting them immunity from liability. However, a 2023 Oregon Court of Appeals decision weakened these protections, jeopardizing public access to both public and private lands.

During the 2024 legislative session, lawmakers passed S.B. 1576A to temporarily restore recreational immunity, adding “walking, biking, and running” to the list of protected activities and extending liability protections through January 2, 2026. North Coast Land Conservancy currently provides access to miles of improved trails and hundreds of miles of logging roads, offering opportunities for hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, and outdoor education. Without the protection of recreational immunity, it will be nearly impossible to continue to provide these community



benefits for free. As a nonprofit, we cannot absorb the financial burden of increased liability and litigation risks.

Land trusts across Oregon face similar challenges. The Fields vs. City of Newport decision has made us vulnerable to costly lawsuits and rising insurance premiums. The passage of S.B. 179 is essential to ensuring continued public access to recreational lands.

We urge you to support S.B. 179 in the 2025 legislative session to safeguard Oregon's cherished outdoor spaces for generations to come. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katie Voelke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katie Voelke
Executive Director
North Coast Land Conservancy