

Deschutes Land Trust

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CONSERVATION. COMMUNITY. CARING FOR THE LAND.

February 18, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Deschutes Land Trust

RE: Support for S.B. 179 and Recreational Immunity Protection

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

The Deschutes Land Trust (DLT) works to conserve and care for the lands and waters that sustain Central Oregon so that local communities and the natural world can flourish together for generations to come. We own and steward over 8,000 acres of property (Preserves) in Central Oregon—a popular tourist destination—2,200 acres of which is open to the public for their recreational use and enjoyment. Providing public access to our Preserves allows us to meaningfully connect our community to the outdoors, but it is not without its risks. DLT relies on the recreational immunity protections in the Oregon Public Use of Lands Act and writes to you today in strong support for S.B. 179 and the continued recreational immunity protections it provides for public and private landowners.

When a 2023 Oregon Court of Appeals decision undermined the immunity from liability guaranteed in the Oregon Public Use of Lands Act, it threatened access to public and private land, including access provided by DLT to over 25 miles of trails on our Preserves for thousands of Central Oregon residents and visitors each year. In the 2024 legislative session, lawmakers passed S.B. 1576A to temporarily restore recreational immunity protections on public and private land by adding “walking, biking, and running” to the list of recreational activities and extending liability protections through January 2, 2026. The passage of S.B. 179 would extend these important safeguards by removing the sunset so we can continue to allow public access to trails and recreational opportunities on our Preserves.

Without the protections provided in S.B. 179, nonprofits like DLT and the many other Oregon land trusts who open their properties for public use could face costly litigation, increased liability insurance premiums and may ultimately be forced to close public access to their properties. Please support the passage of S.B. 179 in the 2025 legislative session. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Natasha Bellis
Conservation Director