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House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Testimony in Support of HB 3314

Chair Helm, Chair Owens, Vice Chair McDonald, and Members of the
Committee:

On behalf of Willamette Riverkeeper, we are writing to express our strong support of HB 3314 which provides critical funding to address harmful algal blooms (HABs) in Ross Island Lagoon. This investment is essential for protecting water quality, restoring critical habitat for juvenile salmon and avian species, and ensuring safe and sustainable recreation opportunities on the Willamette River.

Ross Island serves as a rare and valuable habitat conservation area in the lower Willamette, offering shallow water refuges for juvenile salmon as they migrate toward the ocean and critical nesting and foraging grounds for numerous avian species. However, this habitat has been severely compromised by the stagnant, oxygen-deprived conditions created by the artificial embankment constructed in 1926. Without natural river flow, the lagoon has become an ideal breeding ground for toxic cyanobacteria, leading to recurring harmful algal blooms that threaten fish survival, water quality, and the broader ecological health of the Willamette River, specifically in regard to immediate effects to Oaks Bottom and Holgate Channel habitats.

These blooms not only impact Ross Island Lagoon but also spread downstream, degrading water quality and recreation opportunities across the lower Willamette. Algal toxins can **contaminate drinking water sources, disrupt ecosystems, and deter both people and wildlife from accessing the river.** Paddlers, anglers, and other river users—who rely on the Willamette Water Trail for safe recreation—are directly affected when large-scale blooms render key access points unsafe.

Willamette Riverkeeper has worked collaboratively with the Human Access Project and other stakeholders for years to identify solutions to this problem, including restoring natural water flow to Ross Island Lagoon through a

flushing channel. This approach would help regulate water temperatures, lower pH levels, and reconnect critical salmon habitat—benefiting not just Ross Island but the entire lower Willamette River system. Addressing HABs is **a necessary step toward restoring the river’s ecological balance, improving water quality, and ensuring safe and sustainable access for both wildlife and recreation.**

Moving forward, it will be critical to ensure that any interventions—including the flushing channel design—are informed by comprehensive ecological studies and meaningful stakeholder input. Willamette Riverkeeper looks forward to working with the Human Access Project in facilitating community outreach and stakeholder coordination to ensure a transparent and inclusive process. While restoring natural river flow to the lagoon remains a primary objective, additional complementary measures—such as habitat enhancements, sediment analysis, and riparian vegetation restoration—should be considered to maximize ecological benefits while minimizing unintended impacts. By aligning with **broader watershed restoration efforts** and prioritizing **science-based solutions**, this initiative has the potential to **serve as a model for addressing similar challenges throughout the Willamette Basin.**

HB 3314 provides the essential funding needed to move this long-overdue project toward implementation. Solving the HAB crisis at Ross Island Lagoon is not just about local water quality—it is about the health and future of the entire Willamette River system.

For these reasons, **Willamette Riverkeeper urges your strong support for HB 3314** to restore Ross Island Lagoon, enhance habitat conservation, and improve water quality and recreation opportunities for all Oregonians.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

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