

March 4, 2025

Co-Chairs Representative Ken Helm and Representative Mark Owens  
Oregon House - Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water



Re: Letter of Support for HB3314

I am writing to express the support of the Human Access Project (HAP), for HB3314 which provides funding to address harmful algal blooms in the Ross Island Lagoon.

HAP is a nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon. The mission of HAP is Transforming Portland's Relationship with the Willamette River. Our vision is a City in Love with its River. HAP has one of the strongest water based nonprofit Board teams in the State of Oregon. Our role in the community is catalyzing cultural change around how people feel about and interact with the Willamette River. We want the community to view the Willamette River as an asset, something to be valued and protected. We want to foster and drive a connection between the people of Portland and the river that runs through our community. As such, our goals include improving Willamette River edge spaces for recreation, developing creative activation/programming around these spaces, fostering environmental stewardship, community investment and connection with these spaces, and identifying and removing barriers to people feeling comfortable interacting with the river.

In 2017, HAP and Oregon State University (OSU) began a partnership to remedy the Ross Island Lagoon harmful algal blooms. Working together, HAP supported OSU's development of a peer reviewed hydraulic model which proved that reestablishing river flow through the Ross Island Lagoon with a flushing channel will address this harmful algae threat. Our partnership has cultivated diverse, contributing, invested parties, including all relevant permitting agencies who continue to make themselves available for technical assistance to support a solution to the Ross Island Lagoon algae bloom. In 2024 HAP and OSU completed a \$500,000 fundraising round to pay for 30% design of a channel to restore river flow through the lagoon. This was funded with funds from a Federal Earmark, Multnomah County, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Nature Conservancy and others. The proposed bill would represent the last money in to complete the design phase.

A reestablished river flow through the Ross Island Lagoon would break up the stagnation that produces a significant harmful algal bloom which threatens water quality, human health, juvenile salmon and the broader ecology of the lower Willamette River. Harmful algae eliminate the ability for the river to be swimmable, fishable and drinkable, which disproportionately impacts lower income households. For our economy, a toxic river in downtown Portland will be an anchor around the neck of a downtown recovery.

This is a solvable problem but it will not fix itself. HAP, OSU and our diverse set of partners have momentum and are poised to catalyze a solution to this critical issue. Passage of HB 3314 will be a significant milestone forward to uplifting water quality in the Lower Willamette River.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Willie Levenson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Willie Levenson  
Executive Director  
Human Access Project