



Dear Co-chair Helm, Co-chair Owens, and members of the committee,

My name is Annie Merrill. I'm the Marine Conservation Manager at Oregon Shores Conservation, whose mission is to educate and empower people to protect the ecosystems and communities on the Oregon coast. **On behalf of our organization and over 3,000 members across the state, I ask the committee to support HB 3587.**

HB 3587, or the Rocky Habitat Stewardship Bill aims to add capacity to DLCD to help the state implement the Rocky Habitat Management Strategy.

Our iconic rocky habitats are what makes the Oregon Coast so stunning and unique.

Tidepools, reefs, and rocky formations like Haystack Rock draw visitors from all over the world and help support a \$2 billion tourism industry. These habitats support marine life of all kinds—including over 1 million colonial nesting seabirds; tidepool animals like sea stars, urchins, and anemones; they provide pupping areas for seals and sea lions; and our rocky habitats support critical kelp forests. These habitats are also vulnerable to changing ocean conditions, such as marine heat waves. While many people love to interact with these coastal habitats, they are also being loved to death by coastal visitors.

The Rocky Habitat Management Strategy is a state policy and guidance framework for managing these essential habitats. The plan was updated in 2022 following many years of community engagement and Tribal consultation. The policies within are extremely innovative because they were crafted by communities in a public nomination process that designated eight new sites for protection. Oregon Shores supported volunteers and members of the public on the North and South coast in this process and helped them advocate for sites important to their respective communities (including Ecola point, Chapman point, and Blacklock point). These new sites can now be stewarded by these communities that nominated them, **However, agency capacity at DLCD is insufficient to implement this strategy and support these communities without investment from the legislature.**

The Rocky Habitat Stewardship Bill adds capacity for plan implementation by funding a Rocky Habitat Coordinator position at DLCD and establishing a small grant fund to support community group efforts to conduct outreach and stewardship activities so visitors can enjoy our rocky habitats in balance with protection. This bill is vital to ensuring the plans can be community-led and effective in educating the public about tidepooling etiquette, fishing, and other recreational activities and how to minimize impacts to sensitive habitat and wildlife.

Overall this bipartisan bill has gained broad support from coastal communities and partnerships, independent organizations, fishing interests, and Oregonians across the state who love the Oregon coast. Supporting this bill is a clear win for coastal communities and visitors everywhere, and will help ensure these fragile ecosystems can be protected for future generations to enjoy.

I urge you to please vote yes on HB 3587. Thank you for your time and consideration.
Sincerely,

Annie Merrill
Marine Conservation Manager
Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition



Photo: ODFW Marine Reserves

In Oregon, the beaches belong to the people.

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