



March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025

## Senate Committee on Rules

State Capitol, Salem, Oregon

RE: **Senate Joint Resolution 28**

**Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, Committee Members:**

**With Respect and Gratitude** I greet you as “all my relations,” for we are all connected in so many and avaried ways.

**I want to express my strong support for Senate Joint Resolution 28**, which proposes to amend the Oregon Constitution to establish a fundamental right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment. With an educational background in biology and science education, I am aware of the relationship between ecosystems and their impacts on human health, and believe this amendment is needed to ensure Oregon's future and quality of life.

### Environmental Rights and Good Governance

First, the proposed amendment aligns with global trends in environmental governance. The United Nations Environment Program has recognized **the importance of environmental rule of law** since 2013, acknowledging that violations of environmental law can undermine sustainable development. By enshrining environmental rights in our constitution, Oregon would be taking a significant step towards better environmental governance and rule of law.

### Public Health Benefits

Next, research has consistently shown a strong link between environmental quality and public health. A recent study published in Nature found that effective governance is essential for fostering better environmental quality. By establishing a constitutional right to a clean environment, we can expect to see improvements in public health outcomes. For instance, studies have shown that environmental regulations can reduce the incidence of respiratory diseases.

### Ecological Perspective

Also, from a conservation biology standpoint, this amendment is critical for several reasons:

1. Ecosystem Protection: The amendment would provide a stronger legal foundation for protecting Oregon's diverse ecosystems, which are vital for biodiversity and ecological resilience.
2. Intergenerational Equity: By explicitly including future generations in the amendment, we are **ensuring long-term environmental stewardship**.
3. Holistic Approach: The amendment recognizes the interconnectedness of clean water, clean air, thriving ecosystems, and a stable climate, which aligns with ecological principles.

## Economic Considerations

Finally, while some may argue that this amendment could hinder economic growth, it's important to note that a healthy environment is **the foundation of a sustainable economy**. By prioritizing environmental protection, we can:

- **Reduce healthcare costs** associated with environmental pollution
- **Promote sustainable industries and green jobs**
- **Preserve natural resources** for long-term economic stability

## Empowering Citizens, Strengthens Democracy

The joint resolution proposed by Oregon legislators to amend the state constitution and establish a fundamental right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment **exemplifies a robust participatory democratic process**. Specifically, as follows:

- By allowing voters to decide on this crucial issue, **the legislature is empowering citizens** to have a direct say in shaping the state's environmental policy and constitutional framework.
- This approach **strengthens Oregon's democracy** by ensuring that such a significant change to the state's governing document is not made solely by elected officials, but is instead subject to the will of the people.
- It demonstrates a commitment to **transparency, public engagement, and collective decision-making** on matters of fundamental importance to the state's future.
- By putting this environmental rights amendment to a popular vote, Oregon is fostering a **more inclusive and responsive form of governance**, where citizens can actively participate in determining the long-term direction of their state's environmental stewardship and constitutional protections

## Conclusion

Senate Joint Resolution 28 represents a forward-thinking approach to environmental protection that balances the needs of current and future generations. It provides a robust framework for addressing environmental challenges while promoting public health and sustainable development.

**I urge you to support this resolution and give Oregonians the opportunity to vote on this crucial amendment.** By doing so, we can ensure that Oregon remains a leader in environmental stewardship and public health protection for generations to come.

**With Reverence to you . . . and in Kinship with all life on Earth**

*Albert LePage* ☺

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