
Megan J. Barton

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Dear Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Chotzen and Wallan, and members of the committee,

My name is Megan Barton and I reside in beautiful Hood River, Oregon, where I have access to a mixture of public and private lands for activities that include nordic skiing, trail running, and biking. I also serve as board secretary of our local mountain biking organization, Hood River Area Trail Stewards (HRATS) and I am a nordic instructor for Mt. Hood Meadows. In the capacity of my volunteer position as Board Secretary, paid employee, and as a community user of trail, I appreciate the unique relationship that our community has with the National Forest Service, Hood River County, City of Hood River, private land holders, and timberland owners for recreational land use. Access to these lands are important for physical and mental health and educate the public regarding stewardship and preservation of their unique habitats.

I am strongly encouraging passage of Senate Bill 179 which supports lasting, versus temporary recreational immunity, and keeps trails open in Oregon. The current landowner immunity laws do not provide adequate protection. Valuable recreation and trail access is being threatened by weak laws that are due to sunset without robust protection. Challenges to the current law have allowed for questions regarding intent for recreational purposes to put the responsibility on the land owner rather than the user. The onus for intent for use of recreational spaces should be on the user and not shouldered by the land owner. If immunity is not clearly established, Oregon will face closure of both improved and unimproved lands to all users and potentially tie up courts systems in costly litigation.

In addition to creating permanent statutes for immunity, I would like private land owners to receive an increased level of immunity if they are opening up their lands for the public free of charge. Across the river in White Salmon, Washington, we have a private land owner that

works in conjunction with community members to allow hikers and bikers to use cattle grazing lands for recreational activity. Unfortunately, talks have stalled in Hood River County with several private landowners to allow right of way to county land and trails due to fear of weak immunity protection.

Finally, I would like for the chairs and members of the committee to recognize that while recreation is important for physical health and well being, access to improved and unimproved land is also important for basic transportation. For instance, I take a city path on my bike commute to work that is unimproved. It is a dirt path that allows me to get off the main roads and ride a dirt trail. If this trail was not protected by stronger immunity statutes and the City of Hood River decided to close this trail, I would lose 2 minutes off my commute. I would also be forced to ride on a busy road with cars and miss some challenging dirt trail that improves my biking skills.

Thank you for your consideration,

Megan J. Barton

- Board Certified Nurse Practitioner
- Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIAA) Level One Nordic Instructor
- Professional Mountain Bike Instructors Association -(PMBIA) Level 1 Certified Mountain Bike Coach
- Hood River Area Trail Stewards (HRATS) Board Secretary