

Submitter: Darren Bucich  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Capital Construction  
Measure, Appointment or SB5701  
Topic:

February 13, 2026  
Re: Support for McKenzie River Discovery Center Funding

Dear Co-Chairs and Committee Members,

We are writing in strong support of State funding for the McKenzie River Discovery Center, a shovel-ready project under active construction that will deliver immediate economic recovery to the fire-impacted McKenzie River corridor and offer educational opportunities for all.

The MRDC is not a concept—it is happening now. With all permits secured, construction underway, exhibits ready for fabrication at OMSI, and pilot programming in development for implementation in 2027, this project represents a smart investment in rural economic resilience.

The Discovery Center will attract 50,000 annual visitors, generating \$7 million in regional economic activity, creating year-round jobs in a community still recovering from the catastrophic 2020 Holiday Farm Fire. These visitors will travel through Oregon's tourism gateway cities—Portland, Eugene, Bend, and Medford—supporting hotels, restaurants, and retail throughout the state while discovering a world-class environmental education destination in rural Lane County.

The funding request from McKenzie River Discovery Center is \$4.8 million. If obtained, this provides the finances to finish the capital assets—buildings and exhibits—and they can begin to plan their grand opening in 2027!

We fully support this request and appreciate your partnership in the resiliency of our community.

Darren Bucich  
Fire Chief  
McKenzie Fire & Rescue