

Written Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 5701

Submitted by: Robert Cowie, City Councilor, City of Chiloquin

Testimony in Support of: Senate Bill 5701

Submitted to: Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital Construction

Testimony

February 12, 2026

Dear Co-Chairs Girod and Nosse, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Robert Cowie, and I serve as a City Councilor and Mayor Pro Tem for the City of Chiloquin. I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of SB 5701 to help close the remaining funding gap for Chiloquin's wastewater treatment plant replacement project.

This is not an expansion project or an enhancement project. It is a compliance and public health necessity.

The City of Chiloquin has been operating under a DEQ Mutual Agreement and Order for many years. Our existing wastewater treatment plant is beyond its useful life and cannot meet current discharge standards. The facility has experienced repeated emergency failures, including critical blower failures earlier this year, which have placed our small community at significant operational risk.

More than 53% of Chiloquin's residents are Native American, most of whom are members of The Klamath Tribes. The existing treatment plant discharges directly into the Williamson River. The replacement project will eliminate direct river discharge by utilizing a lagoon system with land application through irrigation. This is an important step forward for water quality, cultural stewardship, and long-term environmental protection.

The total project cost is approximately \$8.1 million. The City has secured \$3.8 million through the Indian Health Service and Business Oregon. We are grateful for that partnership. However, a remaining gap of approximately \$4.2 million stands between us and construction, and without this funding, the city stands the chance of losing the funds already secured.

Our residents currently pay \$51.28 per month for sewer service. Based on a median household income of \$36,659, the affordability index for our community is \$36.10 per month. Our current rate is already 42% higher than the affordability threshold. Simply put, our residents cannot take on additional debt to fund this project.

Despite significant setbacks, including three rounds of LUBA appeals that delayed the project several years, causing the cost of the project to rise significantly, the City has persevered. Final land-use approval has been secured; DEQ has approved the plans and specifications; the land has been purchased; and the project is ready to break ground once funding is secured.

Chiloquin is a small, rural, majority-Tribal community addressing a critical infrastructure challenge as we plan to celebrate our centennial next month and prepare for the next 100 years. We have secured half the funding. We have completed the planning. We are ready to build.

We respectfully request your partnership to close the remaining funding gap so we can complete this project and ensure safe, compliant wastewater treatment for our community.

Thank you for your consideration and your support of rural Oregon communities.

Respectfully,

Robert Cowie

City Councilor

City of Chiloquin



The Klamath Tribes Tribal Council

February 12, 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of The Klamath Tribes, we write to express our strong support for the City of Chiloquin's request for funding to build its new wastewater treatment plant project.

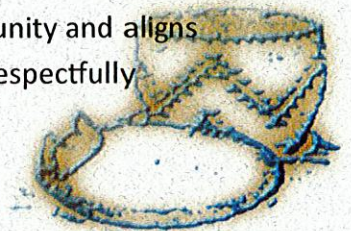
The City of Chiloquin serves a community where more than half of the residents are Tribal members, many of whom are members of The Klamath Tribes. As such, the condition of the city's core infrastructure, particularly wastewater treatment, directly and significantly affects the health, well-being, and quality of life of Tribal families.

The City of Chiloquin is currently operating under a Mutual Agreement and Order with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, and its wastewater treatment plant no longer meets modern regulatory standards. The aging facility has experienced critical failures and continues to pose risks to public health and the environment.

The environmental benefit of this project is of critical importance to The Klamath Tribes. The existing system discharges treated waste water directly into the Williamson River, as well as the current treatment plant is in very close proximity to the river, there is deep concern for a catastrophic failure due to the aged condition of the equipment resulting in an un-treated discharge of raw sewage in to our pristine river. While the proposed lagoon-style treatment facility will discharge through irrigation, it is over a mile from the river, eliminating direct river discharge. Protecting water quality is critical to Tribal values, cultural practices, and long-term stewardship of natural resources. This includes protecting culturally significant species such as the Lost River and Shortnose Suckers, as well as the newly reestablished Chinook Salmon, which are vital to Tribal culture, history, and ecological restoration efforts.

This project represents an essential investment in a rural, Tribal-serving community and aligns with shared goals of environmental protection, public health, and equity. We respectfully

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encourage support for the City of Chiloquin's request for the remaining funding needed to complete this critical infrastructure project.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued support of Tribal and rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William E. Ray Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

William E. Ray Jr.
Chairman
The Klamath Tribes