

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

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Re: SB5701  
Re: Support for McKenzie River Discovery Center Funding  
Date: February 13, 2026

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Fred Girod and Representative Rob Nosse, and Committee Members

I am Ken Engelman, president of the McKenzie River Chamber of Commerce. I appreciate this opportunity to express my strong support for Oregon's funding of the McKenzie River Discovery Center (MRDC). This is a shovel-ready project already under construction in Leaburg that will deliver immediate economic recovery to the fire-impacted McKenzie River corridor.

The Holiday Farm Fire of 2020 severely impacted the McKenzie River area. We are working together to recover from the impacts of that - and other wildfires - that have since occurred in our region.

I'd like to stress that the MRDC project is not a concept - it is happening now. All permits have been secured, construction is currently underway, exhibits are ready for fabrication at OMSI, and pilot programming is in development for implementation. Overall, this project represents a smart investment in rural economic resilience. Studies have shown 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 impacts of COVID, fires, ice storms, and other natural disasters in our area.

Visitors on their way to the MRDC will travel through Oregon's tourism gateway cities - Portland, Eugene, Bend, and Medford – while creating economic support for hotels, restaurants, and retail throughout the state in order to experience this new world-class environmental education destination in rural Lane County.

The project is already 54% funded through \$7 million in funds already raised. State investment will complete what the community has already started, delivering a first-of-its-kind Oregon environmental education center that honors our natural legacy while driving economic recovery where it's needed most.

Our funding request is \$4.8 million. If obtained, this money will fund completion of our

capital assets, buildings, and exhibits to ensure we open the Discovery Center in 2027!

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