

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 Funding the McKenzie River Discovery Center
Date: February 13, 2026

Dear Co-Chairs Fred Girod and Rob Nosse, and Members of the Committee:
My name is Ken Engelman, and I serve on the board of directors for the McKenzie River Discovery Center. Thank you for the opportunity to express strong support for state funding of this shovel-ready project, now under active construction in Leaburg. The Discovery Center will provide immediate and lasting economic recovery for communities along the McKenzie River corridor still rebuilding from the devastating 2020 Holiday Farm wildfire.

That disaster destroyed homes, timber resources, and a historic structure listed on the National Register at the Discovery Center site. Today, however, recovery is underway and momentum is real. All required permits have been secured, construction is in progress, exhibits are prepared for fabrication at OMSI, and pilot educational programming is being developed. This is not a concept—it is a project already moving toward completion.

When open, the Discovery Center is projected to welcome 50,000 visitors annually, generating an estimated \$7 million in regional economic activity and creating year-round employment in a rural community working hard to recover. Travelers will pass through gateway cities including Portland, Eugene, Bend, and Medford, supporting hotels, restaurants, and local businesses across the state while visiting this new environmental education destination in Lane County.

Our request is \$4.8 million to complete capital construction, facilities, and exhibits—ensuring the Discovery Center opens to the public in 2027. This investment represents a practical, high-impact commitment to rural resilience, economic recovery, and environmental education in Oregon.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support.

Ken Engelman
Board Member
McKenzie River Discovery Center
rivref2@gmail.com 541-914-9089