

Submitter: Glade Zarn

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On  
Capital Construction

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5701

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Re: SB5701

From: Glade Zarn: Fretwater Boatworks

Re: Support for McKenzie River Discovery Center Funding

Date: February 14, 2026

Dear Co-Chairs and Committee Members,

I write 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.

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.

Our funding request is \$4.8 million. If obtained, this gives us the money to finish our capital assets—buildings and exhibits—and we open the Discovery Center in 2027!

As an educator, I see MRDC as a vital hands-on science curriculum supporting Oregon's environmental literacy goals and honoring the rich history of the McKenzie River Valley.

As a river guide, I understand how MRDC will inspire stewardship while connecting visitors to McKenzie Valley recreation opportunities, as well as act as a tether to keep a myriad of people connected to the welfare of the community they would otherwise only pass through.

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.

I urge the Committee to support funding for the McKenzie River Discovery Center.

Respectfully,

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