

Submitter: Jeffry Dehne  
On Behalf Of: McKenzie River Discovery Center  
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

From: Jeffry Dehne, President McKenzie Community Partnership

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 a county leader, I see MRDC as essential economic infrastructure diversifying our tax base beyond timber and seasonal tourism, and providing a boost in the McKenzie's economic development.

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,

Jeffry C. Dehne

President, McKenzie Community Partnership

541-915-2163 jcdehne@hotmail.com