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March 23, 2021

Representative Leon Lillie, chair
Members, House Legacy committee
Via email

RE: Parks and Trails Legacy recommendations for Metro Regional Parks 40% Portion

Dear Chair Lillie and members of the House Legacy committee,

The Legacy of Nature Alliance (LONA) brings together organizations and individuals with a unifying mission: “to ensure ecosystems are restored and preserved within the metropolitan regional parks system and throughout the entire region to provide high-quality habitat for wildlife, and year-round Nature-based opportunities to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards.” LONA is comprised of 19 organizations and numerous individuals with thousands of others on mailing and contact lists.

We strongly support the regional parks system as the “State Parks of the Metro”. However, for the past seven years LONA members have been observing the distribution and spending of the metro portion of Legacy Parks and Trails funds to the ten regional park agencies. We have observed a number of anomalies in the dispensation of these taxpayer dollars. These include:

- Funding allocated by the legislature prior to an approved master plan,
- Lack of transparency and undefined projects being submitted for funding,
- Lack of meaningful oversight to determine whether the Legacy funds are being spent as laid out in the 25-year Parks and Trails Legacy plan,
- And lack of accountability to managing the natural resource base of the metro regional parks

This has resulted in an increase of built infrastructure throughout the metro regional parks system with high initial costs and ongoing expenses. In turn, wildlife habitat and Nature-based opportunities, which are the regional parks system’s greatest assets, are diminished.

To address these concerns, during the 2020 legislative session HF 2703/SF 3511 was authored by Sen. Richard Cohen and Rep. Sandy Masin with a number of co-signers (see attached). The bill was written to correct the process for the metro region’s 40% share of the Parks and Trails Legacy Fund, increase transparency, and better meet the public’s expectations for Legacy spending. The bill was scheduled to be heard in the House Legacy committee, but was pulled by Chair Lillie two hours prior effectively stifling the public’s voice on this issue.

We have since continued to gather citizen support from across the metro for protecting and restoring the natural resource base of the regional parks. Until the flawed process with the metro's share of parks and trails Legacy fund is addressed, we cannot support the '22-'23 metro project proposal.

We respectfully request you vote NO and work with us to correct this process.

Sincerely,

Catherine Zimmer and Holly Jenkins
The Legacy of Nature Alliance

Attachment: 2020 HF 2703/SF 3511