

T. W. A.

Lisa Arkin

From: Rep Cannon [cannon.rep@state.or.us]
Sent: Thursday, February 11, 2010 9:28 AM
To: 'matthew.l.garrett@odot.state.or.us'
Cc: Sen Dingfelder
Subject: Highway 36 Water Quality Protection Pilot Project

Dear Mr. Garrett,

In the interest of safeguarding the health of Oregon's waterways and protecting native fish habitat, we are writing to convey our strong support for the Highway 36 Water Quality Protection Pilot Project.

Highway 36 runs for 52 miles between Junction City and Mapleton and is adjacent to Fish Creek, a tributary to the Siuslaw River and spawning ground for native Coho Salmon, Steelhead and Cutthroat trout. Chemical run-off from the application of herbicides along this stretch of road may impair the ability of these species to reproduce. This represents a preventable threat to the riparian ecosystem, as well as to regional fishing economies. For these reasons, we support alternative methods of vegetation management.

It is our understanding that the Highway 36 Water Quality Protection Pilot Project creates and implements an Integrated Vegetation Management Plan which would develop alternatives to the application of chemical herbicides as a part of roadside maintenance along Highway 36. The project would map weed infestations and test the efficacy of mechanical and other non-chemical means of removing invasive vegetation near critical fish habitats.

The project has received support from diverse sources including the Siuslaw Watershed Council, Oregon Toxics Alliance, and local community groups, as well as from Lane County government who is committed to provide staffing and resources.

We understand your concern regarding ODOT's ability to finance this endeavor. The possibility remains to allocate funds for this project through the highway budget. It seems appropriate that ODOT take the lead to pursue funding through the FLEX program. Lane County government has expressed a willingness to support ODOT to apply for state highway FLEX funds. The Oregon Transportation Commission will be discussing the distribution of 2010 FLEX funds at their next scheduled meetings on February 17 and March 10.

Being that the Highway 36 Water Quality Protection Project would be a partnership between ODOT and Lane County, an additional option would be to jointly seek federal stimulus dollars available for water protection and job creation.

This project carries a benefit to environmental and public health and is designed to foster the development of innovative, new ways to deal with roadside vegetation in Oregon. A pilot project designed to avoid herbicides and protect water quality would provide the necessary data to make this a Legislative priority in the future.

We would be pleased if ODOT made this project a priority in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Senator Jackie Dingfelder
Chair, Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Representative Ben Cannon
Chair, House Environment and Water Committee