



November 19, 2013

JOHN A. KITZHABER, MD
Governor

Mr. Jay Graves, Chair
Oregon State Parks Commission
725 Summer Street NE, STE C
Salem, OR 97301-1266

Dear Chair Graves,

I understand the State Parks Commission is deliberating toward a decision this week on a land exchange involving the Bandon State Natural Area, with ties to the acquisition of property in Grant County. While I believe the proposed exchange will positively advance economic and conservation values, it is important as a general matter for the State to consider and address potential impacts of state acquisitions on agricultural and other community values. I offer the following to help address concerns that, if unaddressed, may detract from the overwhelming public benefit measure surrounding the Commission's decision.

First, as to the broader issue, I have instructed my staff and relevant state agencies to begin a study that examines the trends and effect of non-farm uses (including conservation and public recreation uses) on agricultural economic sustainability. This effort has already been convened by my office and will conclude prior to 2015.

Second, with respect to the Grant County acquisition, I believe an opportunity exists to positively address the concerns raised in a manner that protects and enhances agricultural values, public access, recreation, county tax revenue and broader economic benefits relative to the status quo or other pathways the seller may otherwise take. I further believe such an outcome can be very consistent with State Parks' mission as well as conservation values.

To address concerns over loss of tax revenues and private land opportunities, I have directed my Natural Resources Office to work with public entities holding land interests in Grant County (state and federal agencies, and local government) to develop a plan to return some public acreage in Grant County to private ownership within five years, or to county ownership through mechanisms such as Oregon's Community Forest Authority. The exact acreage is not an immediate or easy decision because many public lands involve deed restrictions, other encumbrances, or currently provide values (e.g., livestock leases, recreation including hunting, etc.) that must be further considered. That said, I believe opportunities exist and expect my staff and relevant agencies to work with county officials to sort through the opportunities and specific tradeoffs of converting certain land in Grant County from public to private ownership.

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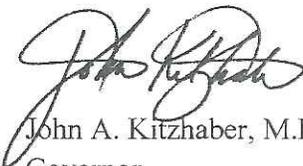
Further, as part of any decision to advance this exchange, I believe the Commission should specifically formalize immediate and up-front commitments to Grant County on the following matters as part of its decision:

- Any loss of tax revenue should be offset by a commitment to continued payments from Parks to the County and increased economic benefit resulting from operation of the park.
- Wildfire risk should be addressed by ensuring State Parks pays into and receives fire protection services from Oregon Department of Forestry's program.
- Protection and enhancement of agricultural values relative to the status quo through water right management and local opportunities for haying, limited livestock grazing, grass banking, and weed management. Any instream protection of water surplus to that used on that land must ensure protection from injury for downstream water right holders.
- Enhancement of public recreation, including hunting, as a measure to manage wildlife populations and impacts to the land in question as well as adjacent lands.
- The property and its main structure will be used to benefit public purposes, not that of any one agency or employees. This includes exploration and advancement of opportunities for education and youth service, showcasing local natural resource management and restoration, and a public activity and events space.

While I understand many details related to the above matters may be best addressed through the master plan process that State Parks typically employs – a process that would directly involve the local public – I request that your decision provides a specific commitment ensuring the Department will remain consistent with the above framework and work closely with county officials and local interests in refining those details.

Oregon's state parks protect our state's natural, cultural, and scenic resources, provide access to outdoor activities for our citizens and visitors, and provide benefits that can improve rural economies. These values can only be fully realized when they function in close harmony with local governments.

Sincerely,



John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.
Governor

c: Richard Whitman; Natural Resource Advisor
Director, Department of State Lands
Director, Fish and Wildlife Department
Director, Department of Forestry
Director, Parks and Recreation Department
Director, Department of Transportation