



Eastern Oregon Visitors Association  
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May 16, 2025

Oregon Tourism Commission  
319 S.W. Washington St., Suite 700  
Portland, OR 97204

To the Oregon Tourism Commission,

As the contracted RDMO for Eastern Oregon, we serve a region spanning 11 counties and two tribal governments—an area that is over 42,000 square miles. 58% of that is public land, and 6 of our counties are considered 100% rural<sup>1</sup>. With a population of less than 200,000, our ability to deliver services depends on deep collaboration with local partners.

Relationship-building is the heart of our work, and it's even more essential now as we embrace a destination stewardship approach and work beyond the traditional boundaries of our sector to achieve greater community outcomes.

The current funding floor no longer supports us to deliver on both this human capacity and the critical marketing needs that our local partners desire and rely on.

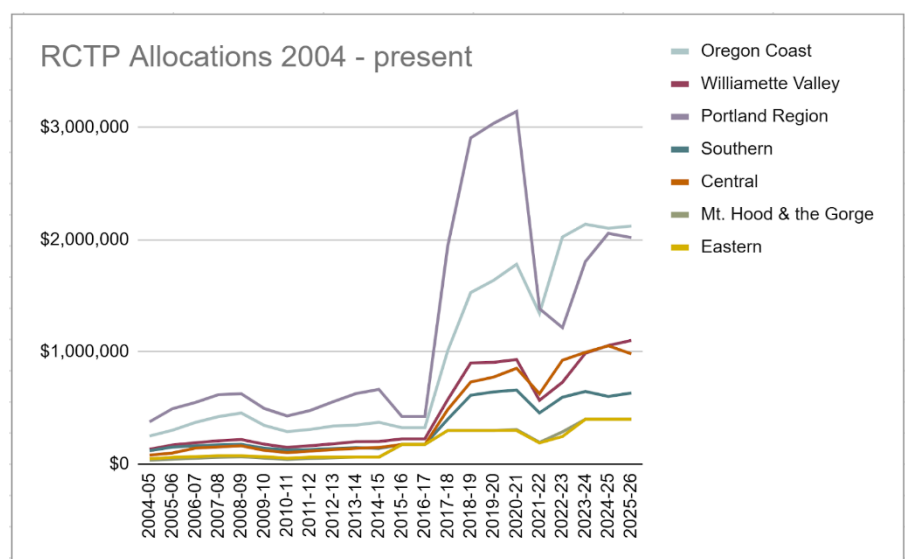
As Travel Oregon embraces a destination stewardship approach, it's important to consider: Are the current RCTP funding levels truly sufficient to support this broader vision?

As you review the strategic plan and upcoming budget, we respectfully ask two things:

1. Raise the RCTP funding floor to \$600,000 beginning this upcoming FY (25-26), and
2. Establish a system to regularly review the RCTP floor and implement a growth model

While this may seem like a significant increase, we have carefully considered this request. \$600,000 is a necessary baseline for delivering the high-quality services Oregon is known for. A major limitation of the current funding model is that the RCTP floor is set at a static number. The graph to the right shows RCTP allocations from 2004 to FY25/26; the static RCTP floor no longer reflects the true costs of delivering regional-based services.

We're seeking a **recalibrated funding floor that reflects the realities of**



<sup>1</sup> The Ford Family Foundation. "Oregon by the Numbers" 2024 edition. [https://www.tfff.org/wp-content/uploads/OBTN\\_2024-091724-1.pdf](https://www.tfff.org/wp-content/uploads/OBTN_2024-091724-1.pdf)

**regional service delivery today**, and that positions every RDMO to lead with excellence.

We are grateful for the funding floor increase at the start of this biennium and the flexibility in RCTP percentages. We're proud of how we have leveraged our RCTP funding to garner more resources and build out our region's capacity. Over the last three bienniums, from 2019 to 2025, through grants and regional partnership funding, we have generated over \$325,000 in additional funding, plus an additional \$185,000 in outside grant funding directly to partners. Over this same period, we have increased our staffing capacity by 100%. This has included capacity building through the RARE AmeriCorps program, which has allowed us to slowly expand staff by securing a full-time equivalent for just \$26,000 annually, and building in more permanent staffing solutions. This has resulted in exponential reach to our local partners, as well as increased grant funding to support visionary regional projects and statewide efforts.

Some additional examples of how we have leveraged RCTP funds for greater regional and statewide benefit include:

- In 2020 our staff led a collaborative grant application to support several outdoor recreation areas that were experiencing a crush of visitation following the COVID-19 pandemic. The grant was awarded and supported work across five of our eleven counties.
- We have significantly expanded our outreach, conducting interviews with 149 tourism industry partners. Insights from these conversations inform our destination development and stewardship work, and marketing priorities that make up our strategic plan.
- Travel Oregon is leading the nation to become the first Destination Verified State with Wheel the World. This effort depends on full collaboration across all seven regions. Accessibility can't be "dropped in"-- it must be built with community. Our staff spent nearly three years building relationships, raising awareness, and fostering interest in accessibility prior to Wheel the World coming to our region. This is the kind of high-touch RDMO programming that makes destination stewardship possible.

Our work to advance environmental stewardship, accessibility and inclusion, and rural economic development simply cannot happen without the trust and rapport that is built through dedicated staff capacity. We had planned to continue adding staff capacity with the RARE AmeriCorps program next year, but with its recent inclusion in the Department of Government Efficiency's termination of over 1,000 AmeriCorps programs across the country—and the resulting funding impacts—at this time, this is no longer a viable option for the next fiscal year.

We share in Travel Oregon's mission of inspiring travel that uplifts Oregon communities; to fully achieve this, we need a funding model that ensures sustained regional investment.

On behalf of more than 150 cities and unincorporated communities across Eastern Oregon, we are respectfully asking you to invest in us - invest in rural - invest in Eastern Oregon.

Your time and consideration is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Alana Garner Carollo  
Executive Director

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Arica Sears

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On behalf of the Oregon Coast Visitors Association (OCVA), I am writing to express our strong support for the request made by Eastern Oregon and Mt. Hood/Gorge to raise the RCTP funding floor to \$600,000 annually and to establish a mechanism for regular review and growth. As regional partners committed to Travel Oregon's mission of inspiring travel that uplifts communities, we understand firsthand the critical need for sustainable, well-funded destination management.

The Oregon Coast is a microcosm of Oregon's diverse tourism landscape: home to iconic destinations that attract global visitors year-round, as well as rural communities striving to grow their visitor economies through product development and strategic marketing. Managing the flow of visitors to our most popular sites while elevating lesser-known communities requires consistent, long-term investment in infrastructure, stewardship, and local capacity-building. An increase in the RCTP funding floor for Eastern Oregon and Mt. Hood/Gorge regions would equip them with the foundational resources needed to deliver high-quality, sustainable tourism experiences.

As regional partners, we share in Travel Oregon's mission of inspiring travel that uplifts Oregon communities. Destination stewardship and visitor management requires on-the-ground engagement, sustained partnerships, and long-term investments in people and place. If we are to deliver on this vision equitably statewide, then every region must be equipped to meet a foundational standard of service. The proposed increase is not just reasonable—it is essential.

Examples of benefits:

Managing High-Impact Areas and Visitor Dispersal:

Oregon's iconic tourism hotspots not only draw visitors to specific regions but also serve as gateways that inspire travel across the entire state. However, these popular destinations experience significant visitor surges during peak seasons, creating challenges for infrastructure and environmental sustainability. Effective site management and strategic visitor dispersal are essential to enhancing visitor experiences while preserving the natural

landscapes that make Oregon unique. Expanding tourism in Eastern Oregon presents an opportunity to alleviate pressure on heavily trafficked areas, allowing for a more balanced distribution of visitors and economic benefits statewide.

#### Expanding Visitation and Length of Stay:

Investing in the development of experiences within the Mt. Hood Gorge and Eastern Oregon opens the door to broader audiences, strengthening Oregon's brand and extending its reach. Enhanced attractions and improved visitor services encourage longer stays, drive increased lodging revenue, and deepen engagement with local communities. This targeted growth supports sustainable tourism, fosters community resilience, and elevates Oregon's appeal as a year-round destination.

#### Unlocking Visionary Statewide Projects:

Oregon is home to several transformative tourism initiatives—such as the Signature Trails Program, the Oregon Film Trail, Oregon Trail History, and the Oregon Food Trails. Strengthening regional capacity in Mt. Hood/Gorge and Eastern Oregon accelerates the realization of these projects, ensuring that visitors experience a consistent, high-quality journey throughout the state. By investing in regional development, we unlock the full potential of these visionary projects, enriching the visitor experience and driving economic vitality across all corners of Oregon.

We stand in strong support of a recalibrated funding floor that reflects the realities of regional service delivery today, and that positions every RDMO to lead with excellence.



## Public Comment to the Travel Oregon Commission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on your biennial plan and budget. Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge, which serves as the RDMO for the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge region, appreciates the thoughtfulness of the draft biennial plan and strongly support its direction—especially its commitments to:

- Equity
- Community-centered destination stewardship
- Economic prosperity across all regions

In alignment with these priorities, we are respectfully requesting that the Commission **raise the minimum funding floor** for the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program from \$400,000 to \$600,000 annually starting FY 25/26. Additionally, we encourage the Commission to **establish a system to regularly review the RCTP floor** and implement a growth model for it—ensuring long-term planning and sustained regional support that brings equity to under-resourced communities in the state.

In the Mt. Hood Gorge Region, overnight lodging development and growth is limited by unique geographic and land use constraints. Much of our region is under management of the US Forest Service and half of the region falls within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area which comes with significant development regulations. Our region reports some of the **highest year-round occupancy rates in the state** (See fig. 1 below), a testament to our consistent work toward filling in mid-week and off-season travel. Yet this also illustrates limited opportunities for growth in lodging supply and collections in the long-term.

Additionally, our proximity to Portland and status as home to some of the state's most treasured visitor experiences result in high levels of day visitation. We now welcome over **10 million visits from US visitors who live 50+ miles away annually**, a 3.2% increase from 2023 (See fig. 2 below). We have compounding visitor management needs in the face of a structural funding gap.

**Figure 1: Occupancy Data**

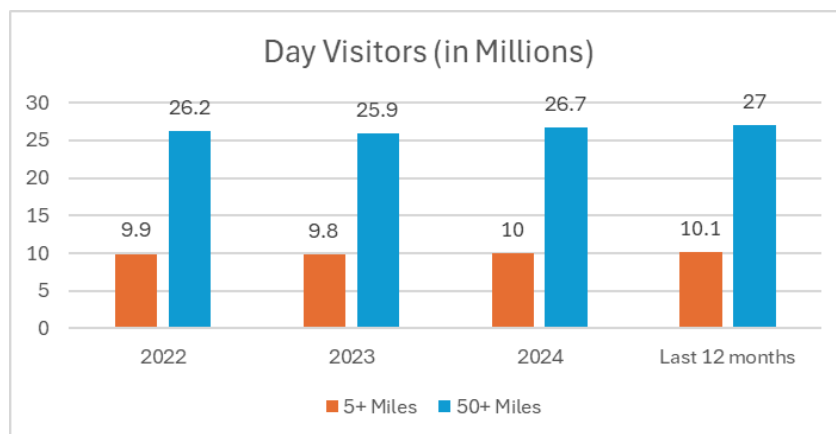
**Running 12 Month Reporting**

Running 12 Months (R12): Apr 2024 - Mar 2025

Region	Occupancy %	
	R12	YoY%
Statewide	60.5%	1.5%
Central	59.8%	3.1%
Coast	58.1%	-0.2%
Eastern	56.3%	3.9%
Mt. Hood/Gorge	63.9%	4.2%
Portland	62.6%	2.5%
Southern	59.5%	1.4%
Villamette Valley	61.5%	-1.2%

(Source: STR March 2025, Oregon Lodging Performance Statistics)

**Figure 2: Day Visitation Data**



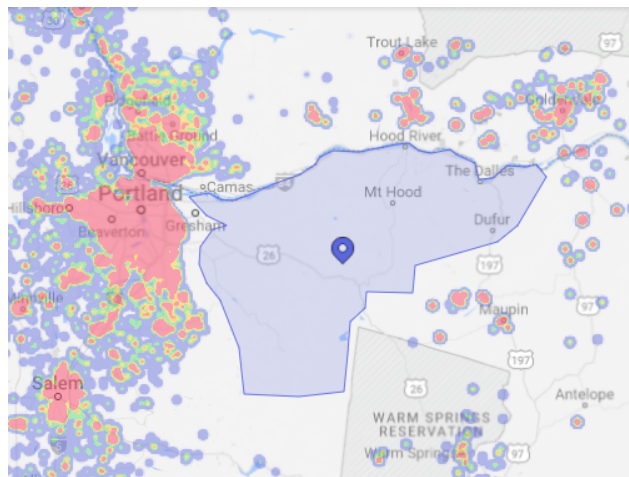
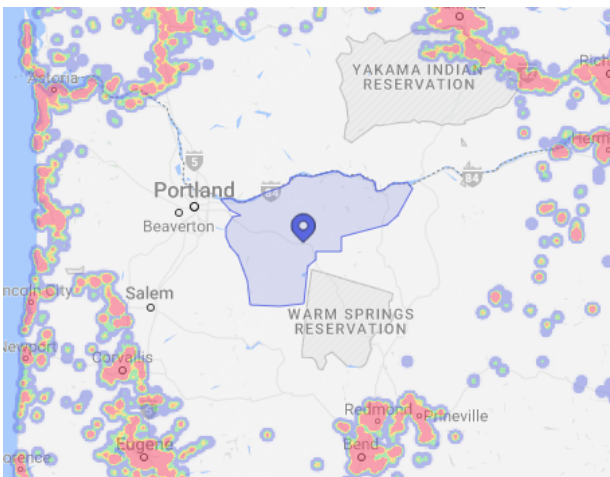
(Source: [Placer.ai](#))

Note, setting the standard visitor definition of 50+ miles away from a destination eliminates Portland metro area visitors to the region, as shown in the image below. If we set the filter to just a 5 mile barrier around the region, which includes Portland and Vancouver metro areas as visitors, that overall visitation almost triples annually. This is more reflective of the true day visitor economy impact on our region.

**50+ Miles**

**5+ Miles**

(Source: [Placer.ai](#))



As a region, we continue to face complex destination management challenges, from congestion and overcrowding to the need for inclusive infrastructure and equitable access. Our partners in the region feel these pressures, as illustrated in the 2024 Travel Oregon Partner Survey where the final Key Finding listed for our region was, “**Addressing funding, visitor management, and advocacy support will be essential for long-term success.**” (Source: 2024 Oregon Tourism Industry Partner Survey, Mt. Hood and the Gorge, pg 5).

This year, with the help of the Collaborative Regional Investment match funding from Travel Oregon, competitive grants, and carryover funds, our program budget exceeded the \$400,000 floor by approximately \$200,000. That additional investment enabled us to support partner needs and visitor management projects including:

- Providing **accessibility upgrades** in the region, including mobi mats for an agritourism site, hidden disability training for partners, and investing in inclusive digital content;
- Offering **shared research tools** like Placer.ai to inform partners’ marketing and destination management decisions;
- Investing in collaborative **high-use destination solutions**, such as investing in the Multnomah Falls timed-use permit system;
- Providing **grant match support** for partner-led projects, like the Native Fish Market in Cascade Locks;
- Expanding **partner outreach and engagement** through new materials and strategies
- And contracting **paid professionals** to support implementation and execution of this work

None of these projects would have been possible with the \$400,000 current base RCTP funding alone. With the dissolution of Travel Oregon’s Collaborative Regional Investment match program, we are left uncertain of our ability to provide many of these critical resources to our communities in the coming biennium.

We deeply appreciate the Commission’s adjustments to RCTP allocations over the years and increased flexibility around how funds can be spent. We are proud of how we’ve leveraged these funds to multiply impact, build regional capacity, and deliver regional services to all our partners. We now ask for your continued support.

We believe our request—to increase the RCTP funding floor to \$600,000 and establish a regular review and growth mechanism—is well aligned with Travel Oregon’s strategic goals and will allow our RDMO to continue supporting impactful visitor management strategies that meet the unique needs of our communities.

Thank you for your leadership and thoughtful consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Ithaca Janzen

Regional Lead

Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge







May 16, 2025

Dear Travel Oregon Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on your biennial plan and budget.

My name is Katie Kadlub, and I have the privilege of serving as CEO of Visit Hood River, the destination marketing organization for Hood River County—part of the Experience Mt. Hood and the Gorge region.

We commend the thoughtfulness of the draft biennial plan and strongly support its focus on:

- Equity
- Community-centered destination stewardship
- Economic prosperity across all regions

In alignment with these priorities, we respectfully request the Commission raise the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) funding floor from \$400,000 to \$600,000 annually for the upcoming biennium. We also urge the establishment of a regular review process and growth model to ensure long-term sustainability and equitable support for under-resourced regions such as ours.

While overnight lodging growth in our region is limited by seasonality, we experience significant day visitation due to our proximity to Portland and attractions like Multnomah Falls, Mt. Hood, the Columbia River, and our vibrant local businesses. We now welcome an estimated 3.5 million day visitors annually placing increasing strain on local infrastructure and highlighting a structural funding gap.

Our community continues to face pressing destination management challenges, including seasonal compression, traffic congestion, wildfire recovery, equitable access, and crowding. These concerns are echoed in Travel Oregon's 2024 Partner Survey, which emphasized the need to address funding, visitor management, and advocacy for long-term success.

The RDMO program has been instrumental in delivering meaningful impact in our region. Examples include:

- Bridge of the Gods Trailhead Restroom Project
- Gorge Towns to Trails
- Gorge Impact Film Festival
- Utilization of PlacerAI
- Troutdale's Art Festival
- The Dalles Public Boat Launch Improvements
- Sunflower Program implementation
- Mobi Mats at Kiyokawa Orchards
- Frontline FAM tours and Tourism 101 trainings

These initiatives would not have been possible without RDMO support.





Increasing the RCTP funding floor and instituting a structured review and growth mechanism aligns directly with Travel Oregon's strategic goals. This investment will empower our region to continue advancing visitor management strategies that reflect and respond to our unique community needs.

Thank you for your leadership and thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Katie Kadlub

CEO, Visit Hood River



May 16, 2025

**Dear Travel Oregon Commissioners,**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment on the draft biennial plan and budget.

As President and CEO of The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce, which also serves as the destination marketing organization under Explore The Dalles, I represent a region that plays a pivotal role in welcoming visitors to the eastern gateway of the Columbia River Gorge. We proudly promote tourism while advocating for responsible stewardship, small business vitality, and economic development that reaches every corner of our community.

We commend Travel Oregon's continued commitment to equity, community-centered destination stewardship, and economic prosperity for all regions. These values are deeply aligned with our own efforts in The Dalles and throughout the Mt. Hood & Columbia River Gorge RDMO.

In that spirit, we respectfully urge the Commission to increase the minimum funding floor for the Regional Cooperative Tourism Program (RCTP) from \$400,000 to \$600,000 for the next biennium and to establish a formal review system to evaluate and adjust this floor regularly. This adjustment would bring crucial support to rural and under-resourced communities like ours, where our ability to generate TLT is limited due to a lack of lodging inventory and infrastructure constraints beyond our control.

Despite those limitations, The Dalles continues to serve as a key hub for regional tourism. Our location on the Columbia River and our rich blend of cultural heritage, museums, outdoor recreation, wine country, and agricultural experiences drive significant day visitation. However, this growing interest has led to increased pressure on our visitor amenities, community spaces, and service providers—highlighting the urgent need for sustainable funding.

Recent destination management efforts supported by our RDMO have been essential. Projects like bilingual signage at key visitor locations, marketing support for East Gorge Food Trail participants, coordination of tourism-based grants, and collaborative content development with neighboring communities are just a few examples of how these funds are strengthening rural tourism resiliency. We are also working on innovative ideas to enhance water recreation access, expand community partnerships, and better tell the story of our region—all of which would benefit from this funding increase.

The RDMO's support has made a meaningful difference in The Dalles. With an increase to the RCTP funding floor, we could go even further—amplifying local impact, responding to changing visitor needs, and continuing to work toward equitable tourism outcomes across our region.

Thank you for your leadership and for considering this request. We appreciate your partnership and look forward to what we can accomplish together.

Sincerely,

**Lisa Farquharson**

President/CEO

The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce & Explore The Dalles

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Maureen Flanagan Battistella

[battistem@sou.edu](mailto:battistem@sou.edu)

Public comment received May 7, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 25/27 strategic plan which provides excellence guidance on activating the Travel Oregon 10 year plan. As an Oregon Heritage commissioner (22-26), Southern Oregon University faculty member and heritage advocate, I would like to suggest several areas where heritage is directly related to the 25/27 strategic plan, and several ways that Oregon's tourism economy can be enhanced. In general, I think that the plan could benefit from a stronger statement of the importance of place, and how the notion of place can be amplified by connecting that place to its history.

When I read Travel Oregon's vision, mission and values, I see that heritage has a clear though unstated relevance to these statements. In particular the values of Community and Equity are directly connected to heritage advocacy and heritage tourism. History builds community by articulating shared heritage; history also invites a deep exploration and reflection on one's personal, family and community's experiences, trials and triumphs. Anecdotally and statistically, heritage advocates know that many travel to seek documentation of a family, event, or community's past, especially for those who have migrated away and return for business and pleasure. I urge Travel Oregon to more clearly identify the metrics needed to reflect this aspect of tourism.

With respect to Equity, there have been a number of significant statewide projects that make a powerful and compelling argument that Oregon takes this value seriously. The Chinese Diaspora Project, research conducted throughout the state and especially in John Day, in Jacksonville and many other locations has won national and international recognition. The historic Black experience in Oregon is everywhere thanks to the work of Oregon Black Pioneers and others, with narrative centers in locations like Jacksonville, Corvallis, Portland, Eagle Point - big towns and little towns. There's so much that could be done with the Black Historic Resources in Oregon, 1788-2002 Multiple Property Submission. Portland and Eugene celebrate the lesbian lifestyle, and OSU is documenting the drag culture. Southern Oregon's counter culture, communal lifestyle and back to the land movement are all still very much alive, rooted in the 1960s and 1970s.

The 10 year objectives of the Travel Oregon strategic plan include Underserved and Under-Resourced communities. I know personally, that our Southern Oregon and likely other rural communities are both. There are dozens of small historic sites and small museums in these rural communities, which have the advantage of splendid forests, clean water,

astounding viewsheds. These can serve to spread out the significant impact of primary season destination tourism, and also provide a bumper season attraction that is in indoor, heated spaces.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I am so grateful to know and better understand the work of Travel Oregon and its regional and local DMOs with a careful read of the biennial strategic plan. You do important work, and I respectfully urge you to include expressly named heritage concepts in surveys and KPIs.

Michael Cavanaugh

[mcavanaugh@travelportland.com](mailto:mcavanaugh@travelportland.com)

Public comment received May 14, 2025

On behalf of the Portland Region, we support Eastern Oregon and Mt. Hood/Gorge's request to raise the RCTP funding floor to \$600,000/year for the next biennium and to implement a system for regular review and adjustment.

Destination management requires sustained coordination, local capacity, and long-term planning. A consistent funding baseline ensures all RDMOs can meet core responsibilities and contribute to Travel Oregon's strategic vision.



May 14, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Central Oregon Region, we support Eastern Oregon and Mt. Hood/Gorge's request to raise the RCTP funding floor to \$600,000 annually but with a defined sunset period determined by the Commission. We acknowledge this funding need, and we believe that this request should be supported but with clear guardrails to ensure that it is neither indefinite nor permanent and with steps to success to ensure that each RDMO in Oregon can self-sustainably achieve the minimum funding floor in the sunset period decided upon. In addition to this, we also support establishing a system to regularly review the RCTP floor based on current needs, and we support implementing a growth model as others have noted.

As regional partners, we share in Travel Oregon's mission of inspiring travel that uplifts Oregon communities. Destination stewardship and visitor management requires on-the-ground engagement, sustained partnerships, and long-term investments in people and place. If we are to deliver on this vision, then every region must be equipped to meet a foundational standard of service. The proposed increase is not just reasonable—it is essential.

**Examples of benefits:**

- **Dispersing visitors and managing high-impact areas:** Oregon has several tourism hotspots in Central Oregon that don't just drive visitors to that region but are the inspiration to visit the entire state. These areas see intense visitation and overcrowding at peak times that require infrastructure and system management to improve visitor experiences and preserve our lands. Additionally, encouraging tourism to less frequently traveled pockets of the region could help reduce pressure on some of our destinations. To leverage these outdoor areas responsibly, we must focus on site management and dispersal strategies.
- **Increasing visitation:** By further developing experiences within Central Oregon, we can continue to expand Oregon's reach to a wider range of visitors. Increased visitation to these other areas means more statewide lodging revenue, longer stays through complimentary experiences, and stronger support for destination stewardship across the state.

We commend our peers for leveraging limited RCTP resources so effectively over the years and we stand in strong support of a recalibrated funding floor that reflects the realities of regional service delivery today, and that positions every RDMO to lead with excellence.

Sincerely,

Scott Larson

President & CEO

Visit Central Oregon