



Representative Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon Legislature

Re: Environment Oregon supports House Bill 2509

Chair Helm and Members of the Committee,

Environment Oregon is a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization working for clean air, clean water and open space. We support House Bill 2509 because we believe that nothing we use for ten minutes should pollute the environment for hundreds of years.

Our country and world's addiction to plastic is a growing problem, responsible for country-sized swirling gyres of plastic waste in our oceans and growing landfills in our country's interior. This pollution is damaging our ecosystems and endangering public health. Every day, Americans throw away an estimated 300 million single-use plastic bags, and it's estimated that Oregonians alone use over 1 billion per year.¹ Less than five percent of those bags are recycled, so bags are one of the most common single-use plastics found in the environment. Like all plastics, they don't biodegrade but instead break down into smaller and smaller pieces. Often, these pieces are swept into our waterways, ending up in our oceans and lakes.

Scientists have found plastic fragments in hundreds of species, including 86% of sea turtle species and nearly half of all seabird and marine mammal species, and ingesting these fragments is often fatal. Plastic bags in particular have been known to be mistaken for food by sea turtles given their resemblance to jellyfish.² This plastic will continue to pollute our water and threaten wildlife for centuries to come.

Nothing we use for a few minutes should be allowed to pollute our planet for hundreds of years, especially when we don't really need it. Banning the use of plastic grocery bags will prevent plastic pollution before it happens and move Oregon towards a future with less plastic on our beaches and harming our wildlife.

¹ <https://www.oregonzoo.org/where-we-stand/plastic-pollution>

² <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/11/animals-eat-ocean-plastic-because-of-smell-dms-algae-seabirds-fish/>

Plastic bags are one of the most common examples of single-use plastic in many people's lives, and as such they are one of the most commonly found forms of plastic pollution on the world's beaches, Oregon included. Plastic bags are routinely featured in the Ocean Conservancy's top ten list of most commonly found plastic items during the International Coastal Cleanup, which includes dozens of sites in Oregon.^{3 4} Besides the sheer quantity of plastic bags being used and their tendency to get blown around, part of the problem is that plastic bags aren't accepted in curbside recycling.⁵ In fact, plastic bags pose a serious problem for recycling centers given their tendency to get stuck in machinery, causing shutdowns of sorting lines and contributing to recycling contamination.⁵

Given the threat plastic pollution and single-use plastic bags pose to wildlife and natural areas, cities and states across the country have taken action to restrict their use and encourage the use of reusable bags and alternatives. One of the biggest steps taken has been a statewide ban on plastic takeout bags in California, enacted by legislators and upheld at the ballot box despite heavy spending by the plastics industry.⁶ The ban was adopted after dozens of cities across California passed their own individual bans, and the results have been clearly positive: plastic bag litter found during an annual coastal cleanup dropped 72% after the ban was put in place.⁷ Cities across Oregon have been taking action themselves to help prevent plastic pollution and ban the bag. 16 communities across the state have taken action, with Hillsboro, Salem, Lake Oswego, Bend, and Silverton taking action in the last few months alone.⁸

Our waters, wildlife, and residents deserve a strong, statewide policy to reduce our plastic footprint, encourage more sustainable alternatives, and begin to move away from our single-use plastic culture. Environment Oregon urges you to pass House Bill 2509 and make Oregon a national leader in preventing plastic pollution and protecting wildlife.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Celeste Meiffren-Swango
State Director, Environment Oregon

³ <https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2017-Ocean-Conservancy-ICC-Report.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.solveoregon.org/beach-riverside-cleanup>

⁵ <https://www.oregonmetro.gov/tools-living/garbage-and-recycling/recycling-home/plastic-recycling>

⁶ <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/environment/sd-me-plastic-bags-20161111-story.html>

⁷ <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/opinion/sd-new-york-plastic-bag-ban-california-20180423-htmlstory.html>

⁸ <https://expo.oregonlive.com/news/erry-2018/12/abafe4ea985011/has-my-oregon-city-banned-plas.html>