



**Testimony by Travis Williams, Willamette Riverkeeper and Executive Director
in support of HB 2844, a bill to protect the Beaver**

March 18, 2021

HB 2844 provides, for purposes of certain statutes relating to taking of predatory animals, that terms "predatory animal" and "rodent" do not include Beavers.

Chair Witt, Vice Chairs Breese-Iverson and Hudson and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

For the record, my name is Travis Williams, Riverkeeper and Executive Director of the non-profit organization Willamette Riverkeeper. Since 1996, we have proudly served as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Willamette River. Together with thousands of Oregonians' support, our conservation and cleanup programs enable us to generate positive change for the Willamette River Basin. We support diversity and inclusion in our work to bring all Oregonians to the Willamette River to recreate, enjoy and protect our river.

We believe in a river with excellent water quality and abundant habitat, and safe for fishing and recreation. We believe this is a fundamental public right. Today I am here to support a bill that will redefine in the eyes of Oregon Revised Statute and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife policy a mammal critically important to Oregon's land and water. Although honored on our state flag, and as our State Animal, the Beaver, *Castor Canadensis*, does not enjoy the protection it deserves as a keystone species, given the important role Beavers play in stream and pond ecology in Oregon.

For the purposes of Beaver management, HB 2844 would reclassify Beavers to their own unique wildlife category, not longer defined as a rodent or predator. This recognizes the crucial role they play in aquatic fish and wildlife health and water management in an increasingly dry Oregon climate, and manage them accordingly.

Current furbearer regulations allow for recreational and commercial Beaver trapping and hunting during the breeding/pregnancy season, and since Beaver kits stay with the adults for up to two years, a whole colony can be removed in a single season. From 2000 to 2018, over 58,000 Beaver kills were reported to the State.

HB 2844 would reduce the only cause of Beaver mortality that humans can control—trapping and hunting by the public. Federal land managers are not restricted by this bill and would retain the ability to manage Beaver-infrastructure conflicts. While non-lethal control methods are encouraged to prevent recurring problems and costs and to maintain Beaver-related benefits, all options for addressing Beaver-infrastructure conflicts remain open. Beaver trapping and hunting would still be allowed on state and county public lands and private lands with landowners' permission.

The benefits that HB 2844 provides Oregon are far-ranging. Beaver dams produce ponds where fish can breed, providing water for other wildlife and migratory birds, and slowly discharges water to recharge aquifers which feeds springs and is a source of much-needed water in drought-prone lands. This creates fire breaks by keeping woodland around the ponds green which can stop or slow the spread of woodland fire. This has the added benefit of being a sink for carbon as part of the natural process of plant photosynthesis while creating all-important habitat for migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway. These benefits earn special standing in wildlife management laws, regulations and best practice in Oregon.

It is ironic that an animal with the enterprise, ingenuity, and skill necessary to build a dam, create a pond, enhance a life-sustaining habitat for so much wildlife could be considered a predator in our laws. Our Oregon State animal has earned the practical and legal protections provided in HB 2844 and should be encouraged and protected on public lands and managed intelligently to reduce Beaver-Human conflicts on private lands, to assure the many benefits this mammal brings to the environment, to our wildlife and to ourselves.

I thank Representative Marsh and Senator Gorsek for bringing HB 2844, Vice Chair Hudson and others for co-sponsoring this bill, and Chair Witt for bringing this bill before this committee today. I appreciate your consideration of my comments and feel that your committee can make a big difference in allowing the energetic Beaver the

opportunity to further enhance the habitat and life of fish, birds and other mammals in the ponds and streams of Oregon.

Chair Witt and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, I urge you to forward HB 2844 to the House of Representatives with a DO PASS recommendation.

Thank you.

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