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House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

OFB Opposes HB 2844

March 18, 2021

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Farm Bureau opposes HB 2844 and the -2 amendments. By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's largest general agricultural trade association, representing nearly 7,000 farm and ranch families in the state, many of whom live in wet parts of the state where their operations must coexist with beavers on the landscape and who would be greatly impacted by the limitations on the ability to manage beavers imposed by HB 2844.

We want to start by clarifying that our farmers and ranchers co-exist well with beavers across Oregon. We recognize the important role that beavers play in Oregon's landscape, and the benefits that they can have in certain ecosystems. However, beavers can also cause significant riparian damage, their dams can block culverts, wash out critical roads, flood farm fields, homes, and parks, and alter water systems that our members rely upon for their farms, forests, and infrastructure, particularly in the wet parts of the state. In these instances, we must act quickly to remove problem beavers to protect our infrastructure from further damage. To be clear, Oregon's farmers and ranchers do not trap or remove beavers for sport or for fun – beavers are only taken when they are causing damage to our farm or road infrastructure.

Presently, beavers are correctly classified as a "rodent" and managed under ORS 610.002 as a predator on private lands. Under current law, they can be taken by a private landowner or their agent on their private lands without the need for state authorization. They can be taken on public lands with a furbearer license and adherence to all pertinent regulations. HB 2844 and the -2 amendments would change that management structure, moving management authority to ODFW and away from ODA where all other predatory animal rules are currently administered. The bill would require a permit be issued for all take of beaver, require questionable relocation and non-lethal deterrence measures, and pile on onerous reporting timelines.

The Oregon Farm Bureau opposes HB 2844 and the -2 amendment for a number of reasons:

First, HB 2844 and the -2 amendment are not grounded in science. Beavers are abundant on our landscape, with estimated populations around 70,000 to 80,000 beavers on the landscape. There is no data that suggests that their populations are declining or that they need additional protection – indeed, our members’ experience is that they are becoming more abundant on the landscape. Additionally, the bill proposes to remove the classification of beavers as a rodent. Beavers are taxonomically classified as rodents and should be correctly identified in statute.

Next, HB 2844 will limit needed beaver management activities. HB 2844 would remove the ability of landowners to address damage on their property without first getting a permit from ODFW and completing non-lethal deterrence as outlined in the bill, some of which will actually harm beaver populations. There is no ability to expedite this process if there is a beaver whose dam is causing jeopardy to property or damaging crops. Under the -2 amendments, more authority for designing a permitting system would be granted to the Fish and Wildlife Commission, but still mandates permitting and reporting around the take of beavers. There is a reason that beavers are classified as a predatory animal on private lands - our landowners need to maintain the ability to manage predatory species as needed to protect their operations, and cannot wait for a permit prior to doing needed beaver removal. The state should not eliminate tools for landowners, especially with no sound scientific basis to do so.

Finally, we are concerned that this bill will upend the ODFW’s workgroup process. After a petition regarding trapping on federal lands was voted down by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, ODFW created a workgroup that is going to address a myriad of issues related to beaver management. As part of that workgroup process, we anticipate that ODFW will evaluate the numbers of beavers on the landscape and whether additional protections are needed. The legislature should not disrupt that process.

We believe that our state’s wildlife management decisions must be grounded in science, give landowners the tools they need to address problems as they arise, and respect the current roles and responsibilities of agencies. HB 2844 does not meet these pillars of wildlife management, and we urge your opposition. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2844 and please contact us if you have any questions.

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