



March 20, 2023

Oregon House of Representatives
Committee on Climate, Energy and the Environment
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 3464

Dear Chairwoman Marsh and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 3464 to reclassify beaver (*Castor canadensis*) for management purposes in the Oregon Revised Statutes. HB 3464 is a common sense, balanced approach to improving the climate resilience of Oregon; centralizing and streamlining beaver management; increasing and improving data collection to inform conservation and management; providing educational opportunities for landowners to profit from the presence of beavers; and all without affecting existing options for recreational opportunities or protecting private property.

The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) is a conservation organization based in Bend, Oregon with a mission to protect, defend and restore Oregon's high desert on behalf of our more than 14,000 members and supporters from across Oregon and beyond.

For more than 15 years, ONDA has been working with diverse stakeholders throughout Oregon's high desert to restore the hydrology, habitats, connectivity and climate resilience of desert streams by strategically addressing limiting factors that impede the management of riverscapes by beavers. These limiting factors can be grouped into four categories. The first three categories are habitat, hydrology, and topography. The fourth category represents the cultural aspect of direct human interactions with beavers and beaver habitat. Limiting factors in *all* four categories must be mitigated in order for beavers to successfully manage riparian zones and create the conditions necessary for biodiversity conservation and climate resiliency. The success of state, federal, local and landowner conservation and climate resiliency strategies involving beavers depends on creating a culture, and supporting policy and legal framework, that values beavers and their role as ecosystem engineers.

ONDA supports HB 3464 because it sends a clear message of re-prioritizing how the state of Oregon views beavers, and beavers' role in climate resiliency. Unfortunately, there will be some who attempt to sow doubt and confusion about the extent or value of beavers' role in improving Oregon's climate resilience. Not unlike past "debates" about the validity of climate change itself, those who refuse to acknowledge the role of beavers in climate mitigation will cite the need for "further studies" before action; suggest piecemeal or unsubstantial "alternatives" to needed action; and selectively quote from a diminishing field of contrarians to maintain status quo policy for as long as possible. But just as it was the case with the debate around climate change, the evidence regarding the benefits of beaver

managed floodplains is settled and substantial. As outlined and summarized most recently in [Beaver: The North American Freshwater Climate Action Plan](#), it is clear that beavers have a large and important role to play in a broad strategy for protecting Oregon's riverscapes, and the fish and wildlife, local communities and regional economies that depend on them. HB3464 is our opportunity to update an antiquated approach to beaver management and acknowledge that [there are important, needed benefits from beavers on private working lands](#) that cannot be achieved by a culture mislabeling them as "predators."

The impact on beavers of being statutorily categorized as a "predator" is clear. Long-term, state-wide data-sets show decreasing beaver populations and a loss of climate resilient beaver managed floodplains in Oregon. [Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife \(ODFW\) Catch per Unit Effort \(CPUE\) data](#) spanning 1997 to 2020 indicates a downward trend, meaning that each trapper is expending more effort to catch fewer beavers. [Records of beavers trapped by the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service \(APHIS\)](#) in response to animal damage complaints from 1997 to 2017 have declined even more steeply. And counts of beaver dams conducted as part of Oregon's statewide stream surveys (data not publicly available) have likewise shown, not only a decrease in the number of beaver dams, but a state with very few miles of streams and creeks with any beaver dams at all. This should not be the case in the "Beaver State," [where not too long ago beaver dams were not the "exception" but the rule.](#)

ONDA supports HB 3464 because it provides for the centralization of beaver data collection; streamlines management options with the state agency responsible for wildlife management; and encourages creating (but does not mandate) opportunities for educating landowners about [more effective, and less expensive](#) ways to coexist with beavers. The bill also directly addresses concerns regarding data gaps which might impede effective beaver management.

Finally, ONDA supports HB 3464 because only the legislature can update the statutory classification of beavers as "predators," and thus [eliminate the associated regulatory and policy roadblocks](#) to improved management and data collection to support a statewide climate resilience strategy. Other alternatives such as proposed rulemaking changes, statutory clarifications, or data collection expansions described in HB 3464 are not forthcoming: This was made clear by ODFW's recently drafted "Three-Year Beaver Action Plan" which does not include changes which would duplicate what HB 3464 could achieve.

HB 3464 is a common sense, balanced approach to improving the climate resilience of Oregon; centralizing and streamlining beaver management; increasing and improving data collection to inform conservation and management; providing educational opportunities for landowners to profit from the presence of beavers; and all without affecting existing options to maintain recreational opportunities or protect private property.

Sincerely,

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