



**Gilliam County Soil and  
Water Conservation District**

PO Box 106, 234 S. Main St. Condon, OR 97823

Phone (541) 384-2672 <https://www.gilliamcountyswcd.com>

February 1st, 2024

House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment

900 Court Street NE, Salem, Oregon

RE: House bill 4014

Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Levy and Levy, and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Gilliam County Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Directors I am providing this written testimony in support of HB 4014. The SWCD serves the people of Gilliam County, a rural agricultural community in North Central Oregon. The uplands of the area are dominated by dryland cereal crops and rangeland but tucked away in the Lower John Day Canyons lie hundreds of miles of important Mid-Columbian Steelhead habitat. It is with this essential habitat in mind for a species that is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act that the SWCD hopes to see this bill pass.

For several years the SWCD has pursued beaver management as a restoration strategy to improve native fish habitat, improve water quality, and mitigate the effects of drought. A major obstacle to these restoration efforts was a lack of suitable habitat for beavers themselves. Beginning in 2020, the district began implementing Low-Tech Process-Based Restoration (LTPBR) on a landscape scale throughout Gilliam County watersheds. LTPBR is a method of ecological restoration that prioritizes simple, inexpensive interventions to mimic natural processes and encourage self-sustaining recovery in degraded ecosystems. In Gilliam County we have combined riparian plantings and installed structures that mimic beaver activity to expand their distribution within the county, as it is currently very limited. Since 2020, the SWCD has implemented projects on 20.5 miles of steelhead stream on privately owned lands with a total of 1,011 structures. We are creating the needed habit, but also need to prepare for the inevitable recolonization of these areas by beaver and co-existence with landowners and their operations.

HB 4014 would allow SWCDs like ours to have the resources available and the technical expertise at hand to help people and beavers benefit from a functioning riverscape. Issues may eventually arise with plugged irrigation systems/culverts, flooded river fords, felled trees, etc. For example, a major restoration opportunity was recently extinguished because a program like the one HB 4014 seeks create was not in place. An almost 20-year restoration effort to re-vegetate and restore 2.5 miles of steelhead stream finally had





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beaver colonize the project site. The landowner was excited, and the benefits were immediate with more water in-stream during drought and the groundwater recharging. However, the beavers continually plugged a culvert flooding infrastructure and unfortunately the beavers were removed. If additional resources were made available for the landowner and SWCD to find a solution those benefits could have continued.

Over the past 10+ years the culture surrounding beavers has evolved positively in our region. The SWCD used to receive phone calls to trap and relocate beavers, but now we are asked by landowners if we know how to get beavers onto their property. The benefits of co-existing with beavers continue to be realized by more and more people each year and the SWCD believes that HB 4014 could prove to be a catalyst for continued cultural adoption. As we create more beaver habitat, we create opportunities for more interaction and consequently more resources will be needed to keep these valuable animals in streams. To achieve that ultimate ending result, the Gilliam County Soil and Water Conservation District respectfully asks you to move HB 4014 forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Herb Winters". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Herb Winters  
District Manager  
Gilliam County SWCD

Jordan Maley – Chair  
John Anderson – Vice Chair  
Rich Harper – Secretary/Treasurer  
Chet Wilkin – Zone 1  
Doug Potter – At-Large

