



February 5, 2024

House Committee on Climate, Energy, and the Environment

Re: Support for House Bill 4014, Landowners Living with Beavers Grant Program Fund

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice-Chairs Bobby Levy and Emerson Levy, and Members of the Committee,

Trout Unlimited is known in Oregon and throughout the nation for its work in restoring riparian and instream habitats in collaboration with government agencies, conservation organizations, and private landowners. The 3,400 Oregon members of Trout Unlimited are affiliated with our grassroots entity, the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited.

On behalf of the 3,400 members of Trout Unlimited in Oregon, we ask you to move HB 4014 forward.

Nature has provided us with an industrious and cost-effective ally in our work to protect and restore habitat for native fish. Of all places in the U.S., Oregon should be protecting beaver populations to assist us in restoring our watersheds and fisheries.

Many of our state's rivers and lakes are in poor condition. What were once world-renowned fish runs are now approaching extirpation in many places. But it is not just about fish; these hard-working rodents and the structures they build can improve water quality, restore ground water, and mitigate the impacts of wildfires—all to the benefit of humans as well as the environment. In [Attachment 1](#), we've provided a copy of a recent article authored by Greg Fitz and published in the Fly Fish Journal, regarding the ecological benefits of beavers. This bill will expand and support the work of allowing beavers to provide these benefits on the landscape by offering funds, training and support for private landowners to coexist with beavers.

We recognize that there can be significant conflicts between beavers and landowners. We are pleased the Oregon Legislature is stepping up to fund non-lethal remedies for landowners that will allow more beavers to continue their positive effects on waterways. We hope this results in increased public support for beavers as partners in this process.

ODFW has developed a beaver management plan that recognizes the importance of private lands in maintaining a healthy population of beavers. However, the agency does not have funds dedicated to implementing the plan. The expense of the needed equipment or the lack of

technical knowledge are often barriers for landowners who might otherwise be open to trying non-lethal options. HB 4014 funds will allow many more private landowners the choice of co-existence.

A 2016 report commissioned by the legislature revealed that the majority of Oregonians are concerned about habitat loss, lack of water, declining fish populations, and conservation and management of resources in general. This bill is a modest but meaningful way of addressing those concerns.

HB 4014 is another important step in Oregon's long-term conservation goals including ODFW's Oregon Conservation Strategy, Oregon's 100 Year Water Vision, as well as ODFW's mission "To protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations."

Please bring forward and approve HB 4014.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark W. Rogers".

Mark W. Rogers
Chair, Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited

Attachment 1

See attached: Greg Fitz, *The Good Dam: Beavers are a Landscape's Best Friend*, The FlyFish Journal (Issue 15.2).

BROADLY SPEAKING, practitioners refer to this work as “low-tech, process-based restoration,” but the easiest way to understand it is simply doing the work beavers would had they not been removed in the first place.

High-tech restoration refers to large-scale interventions that require heavy machinery and, often, extensive engineering. This might mean dam breaching, culvert removal or replacement, or adding logjams back to river systems with earth-moving equipment or helicopters. The magic of low-tech work is that it is done by hand, with simple tools such as saws, shovels, buckets, grip-hoists and post drivers. Mostly, to do this work, you just need a crew willing to get in the water, get dirty and work like a beaver.

This work centers on building “post-assisted log structures” (PALS) and “beaver dam analogues” (BDAs), structures in the stream channel that function like small beaver dams, to kick-start the hydrologic processes needed to hold water on the landscape and rebuild lost habitat. To build BDAs and PALS, crews drag logs into the stream and pound stakes into the riverbed, stack and weave branches around these anchor pieces, and pack it all with soil and rocks to build a semi-permeable barrier. Water begins to impound as they are built. In northeast Oregon, Northwest Youth Corp members working on hand crews would often find juvenile salmon and trout holding in these new pools only days after they were built in the headwaters of the Grande Ronde and John Day rivers.

In much of this work, crews also plant willow and cottonwood and other native plants near the BDAs to help reestablish a stream’s riparian habitat. Eventually, as they grow, these trees will become food and building materials for the beavers who show up to maintain these places. Last summer, NASA published satellite data and photos documenting the benefits of this work in Idaho. Where beavers had returned there was much more

vegetation compared to the nearby streams where they hadn’t been reintroduced.

This beaver-based restoration work can be relatively fast and mobile. Crews can work in remote locations that might be difficult to reach or just inappropriate for heavy equipment. In California, crews doing this work in designated wilderness areas in national forests use mules to haul in equipment and supplies miles from the nearest road. On bigger restoration projects, practitioners work alongside heavy equipment or follow up to maintain the sites as they recover in subsequent years. Experienced crews get into a rhythm building BDAs and PALS, treating miles of streams in a season, often for much lower costs compared to hiring earth-moving machinery. It is also work volunteers can learn to do when guided by experienced practitioners.

This work is being undertaken by a wide range of conservationists, agencies and tribes. Anabranch Solutions, a group founded by researchers from the watershed sciences department at Utah State University, is leading projects and providing extensive educational resources about low-tech, process-based restoration. Their website is an informational clearinghouse, providing details about research informing this work, testimonials about past and current projects, and instruction manuals on low-tech process-based restoration.

My colleagues at Trout Unlimited are relocating beavers and building BDAs to help wildfire resilience in Washington state; restoring salmon and steelhead habitat on the Snake and Columbia rivers; using these techniques to prepare habitat for the return of salmon in the upper Klamath River as the world’s largest dam removal gets underway; restoring golden trout habitat in high-elevation meadows in the Sierra Nevada mountains; and numerous other projects benefitting trout populations and water supplies across the mountain west and southwest. Often, anglers volunteering with a local Trout Unlimited chapter can get involved or support this work directly.



ACROSS THE DRIER, hotter American West, our watersheds, and the fish, animals and communities that depend on them, are at a crossroads. Historic land-use changes from logging, agriculture and development, and the growing impacts of climate change, are compounding to rapidly impact water temperatures, water availability and wildfire resilience. As anglers, many of us see these impacts to trout and salmon in our home waters firsthand.

As society grapples with how we’ll provide energy, manage our shared land and resources, feed our communities, and protect and recover biodiversity, beavers provide lessons and act as allies to help rebuild the natural systems that sustain water supplies and habitat. Frankly, they’ll do this work for free if we’ll only let them.

When and where beavers aren’t immediately available, process-based restoration offers a practical, affordable intervention needed across thousands of stream miles in the west.

With huge issues such as climate change and land use, there is no silver bullet, but the cascading benefits provided by beavers, and restoration guided by their expertise, offer meaningful, positive opportunities for recovering and sustaining durable ecosystems. For anglers deeply concerned about our trout and salmon numbers, real hope is offered by the vision of saturated floodplains, headwater impoundments recharging groundwater, and tiny silver trout and salmon fry sheltering and growing in cold, deep beaver ponds where their dams have been missing for over a century. ☞

«ABOVE»
Bird’s eye view of BDA structures being built on Fish Creek in California’s South Fork Kern River Watershed by Trout Unlimited CA Inland Trout Program, Sequoia National Forest, and the Tubatulabal Tribe of Kern Valley. Photo: Katie Falkenberg