



Date: January 6, 2024
To: Ways & Means Natural Resources Subcommittee
From: Willamette Riverkeeper
Re: HB 4148

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water,

Willamette Riverkeeper is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting, restoring and promoting the enjoyment of the Willamette River. We are writing in strong support of HB 4148 ("The Omnibus Wildlife Bill"). We support all elements of this bill but in particular the "Promoting Wildlife Stewardship and Coexistence" Package. We have worked extensively on this portion of the bill and will focus our comments primarily in this arena.

The Coexistence Funding Package would allocate funding to establish a program to promote wildlife stewardship, reduce and respond to human-wildlife conflicts and engage new audiences in wildlife conservation. Specifically, it would fund 5 new wildlife coexistence biologist positions stationed around the state, a wildlife communications coordinator position to lead a Living with Wildlife Outreach Campaign and a small grant program to support Oregon's wildlife rehabilitation centers which serve on the frontlines of human-wildlife interactions.

This program developed by a task force established by the ODFW Commission in 2022 and which included two ODFW Commissioners, ODFW staff, Oregon State Police, and representatives from Portland Audubon, Humane Society of the United States, Chintimini Wildlife Rehabilitation Center and Wildlife Center of the North Coast. Bob Sallinger, now with Willamette Riverkeeper, represented Audubon on this task force. The program unanimously endorsed by the ODFW Commission.

The task force was created in response to a growing recognition that current resources are inadequate to promote wildlife stewardship, reduce and resolve human-wildlife conflicts and support partnerships. This can result in:

- Unnecessary harm to wildlife
- Property damage
- Risks to public health and safety
- Reactive rather than proactive approaches that result in increased costs and decreased efficacy
- Missed opportunities to constructively engage the public in wildlife stewardship
- Community frustration
- Negative publicity

As humans and wildlife come into more and more frequent contact, it is critical that ODFW have the resources to promote stewardship and reduce conflicts across urban, suburban and rural landscapes.

The Wildlife Coexistence Package is an effective strategy to engage growing and increasingly diverse populations across all landscapes to further the protection of Oregon's wildlife.

Additionally, we also support the other three elements of this package which includes the following:

Addressing Wildlife Disease

The Oregon and Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory (OVDL) plays a vital role in public health, responding to issues of serious concern for people and wildlife, including highly contagious bacterial disease, avian flu, and mosquito born illnesses. Yet, the OVDL remains in need of resources. Consistent with recommendations from the legislative report directed by HB 4128 (2022), HB 4148 allocates \$3.5 million for critical equipment and capacity necessary for the OVDL and the state Wildlife Health Lab to combat threats such as Chronic Wasting Disease and zoonotic diseases. Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

Responding to Invasive Species

Invasive species are associated with an estimated \$200 billion in losses and control costs nationally each year (adjusted to 2024 dollars). In Oregon, invasive sudden oak death can cause as much as \$600 million per year in damage to our forest and nursery sectors, and threats continue to arise such as European green crabs impacting northwest fisheries and highly damaging quagga mussels discovered in Idaho and recently transported into Oregon. Similar to wildfire response, addressing invasive species is a race against the clock. HB 4148 would allocate \$1.5 million for the Oregon Invasive Species Council to evaluate and address vulnerabilities, increase public awareness, and respond to emergencies.

Ensuring Safe Passage for People and Wildlife

Efforts to reduce the numerous vehicle crashes involving Oregon wildlife have proven both highly popular and extremely effective. HB 4148 will further improve outcomes by bolstering technical guidance available to planners and engineers integrating wildlife crossing features in highway projects. The bill would also update relevant agency reports to ensure we have the information we need on projects, timelines, and funding.

We respectfully urge you to advance HB 4148 in its entirety.

Bob Sallinger
Conservation Director
Willamette Riverkeeper
503 380-9728
bob@willametteriverkeeper.org