



## **Testimony in Support of HB 3143 – Landowners Living with Beaver Grant Program Fund**

**January 29, 2025**

Chair and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 3143, the “Landowners Living with Beaver Grant Program Fund.” As organizations dedicated to the protection of southwest Oregon’s natural landscapes and watersheds, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KS Wild) and Rogue Riverkeeper recognize the vital ecological importance of beavers and the essential role they play in maintaining healthy and resilient ecosystems. We represent approximately 10,000 members and supporters across Oregon and beyond.

We appreciate that HB 3143 proposes the creation of a funding mechanism through the Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund (OCRF) to assist private landowners in implementing beaver coexistence strategies. The ability to provide financial support for these strategies will help landowners effectively manage beaver populations, and most importantly, restore the vital functions that beavers provide to our landscapes.

### **Ecological Importance of Beavers**

Beavers are an iconic keystone species, crucial to the health of our ecosystems, especially as we wish to retain and develop wildfire and climate change resilience and resistance into our landscapes. In our region, we have seen the work of beavers assist in restoration after the Almeda Fire of 2020. The work they do in riparian zones are vital for water retention, sediment filtration, and ecosystem complexity. Beaver wetlands enhance groundwater recharge, improve water quality, and foster biodiversity. By slowing and spreading water, beaver-created wetlands help to reduce the risk of both floods and droughts, improving the resilience of our landscapes to climate extremes. These wetlands also create critical climate refugia for many species, allowing them to survive in areas that might otherwise be inhospitable due to temperature extremes or water scarcity.

The habitats that beavers create also provide essential support to salmon and other aquatic species. Beaver ponds create cool, deep pools that are critical for juvenile salmon, and their dams help to filter sediment and improve water quality in our rivers and streams. As Oregon's salmon populations continue to face pressures from habitat loss and climate change, protecting and restoring beaver habitats is a direct and effective way to support salmon recovery and ensure the long-term health of our rivers.

## **The Need for the Landowners Living with Beaver Grant Program Fund**

In 2023, the Oregon legislature passed HB 3464, which removed the predatory animal status of beavers and transferred their management to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). This policy shift presents a unique opportunity to move away from historical practices of extermination and instead embrace strategies that allow for the coexistence of beavers and human activities on the landscape. However, this shift also presents a challenge for private landowners who may be unfamiliar with non-lethal management techniques or who may lack the resources to implement these new practices.

The establishment of the Landowners Living with Beaver Grant Program Fund within ODFW is a crucial step in supporting these landowners and advancing the goals of the 2023 Beaver Action Plan. This three-year plan, developed by ODFW with the help of stakeholders, focuses on the restoration of beaver habitats and includes private lands as a key component. Unfortunately, despite the clear need for this work, no funding has been allocated to support landowners in this transition. Without financial resources, landowners may continue to resort to outdated, harmful methods of beaver management, undermining the potential benefits beavers bring to our landscapes.

The Landowners Living with Beaver Grant Program Fund will provide necessary financial assistance to landowners so they can implement effective beaver coexistence strategies that align with the goals of the Beaver Action Plan. These strategies may include beaver relocation, installation of flow devices, restoration of riparian habitats, or providing technical assistance for landowners navigating these options. The program will help landowners transition away from lethal control methods and toward long-term, ecologically beneficial solutions.

## **Benefits to Private Landowners and Communities**

The passage of HB 3143 will also provide significant benefits to landowners who wish to live alongside beavers and protect beaver habitats. Beaver dams are natural flood mitigation systems that help reduce the impacts of high-water events, often saving property and infrastructure. By maintaining healthy beaver populations, landowners will contribute to increased groundwater storage, which enhances water availability during drought conditions. In an era of climate uncertainty, the ecological services provided by beavers—such as improving water quality, reducing erosion, and supporting wildlife habitat—are increasingly vital to the health of Oregon's rural communities and agricultural lands.

Moreover, implementing beaver coexistence strategies is more cost-effective in the long run compared to the alternative of frequent and expensive removal programs. The initial investment in beaver management techniques such as the installation of flow control devices or the restoration of riparian areas will help prevent the costly damage caused by unmanaged beaver activity, while also providing substantial ecological benefits.

## **Conclusion**

The Landowners Living with Beaver Grant Program Fund represents a forward-thinking solution to the growing challenges faced by private landowners, rural communities, and Oregon's ecosystems. This program provides an essential opportunity to shift from a history of beaver extermination toward a more harmonious and ecologically sustainable approach to managing beaver populations. By supporting the coexistence of beavers with landowners, we can restore vital ecological functions, improve water quality, enhance salmon habitat, and foster climate resilience in Oregon's landscapes.

KS Wild and Rogue Riverkeeper strongly urge the committee to support HB 3143. This bill will not only support Oregon's landowners, but will also protect the ecological health of our state's rivers, watersheds, and communities for generations to come. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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