

Submitter: Joseph Vaile
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2977

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Bonham and members of the committee,

I wanted to alert you to this letter that appeared in the Ashland News that strongly supports HB 2977.

<https://ashland.news/invest-in-wildlife-invest-in-oregon/>

Letter: Invest in wildlife, invest in Oregon

June 1, 2025

Southern Oregon's natural beauty and wildlife don't just make this region special — they are the foundation of our outdoor economy and way of life. But without sustained investment in conservation, we risk losing wildlife and our region's identity. Right now, the Oregon Legislature has an opportunity to act by passing HB 2977, a simple, smart solution to a long-standing problem.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife carries the primary responsibility for managing Oregon's native plant and wildlife species. However, it has never had reliable, sustained funding to do this work effectively. A legislative report flagged this issue nearly 10 years ago, and it persists today. When properly funded, ODFW's programs produce measurable, positive outcomes for wildlife, as highlighted in recent testimony before the Oregon Legislature.

The solution is an Oregon House Bill, HB 2977, that would modestly raise the state's transient lodging tax from 1.5% to 2.5%, generating an estimated \$30 million annually for the agency to support critical wildlife management and habitat protection. Even with this modest increase, Oregon would maintain the third-lowest lodging tax in the country. Importantly, most of these funds would come not from local residents or businesses, but from out-of-state visitors who often visit to enjoy our natural beauty.

We've already seen the cost of inaction. For example, the Winter Wings Festival was held in Klamath Falls for over 42 years each February, drawing more than 500 visitors, most of them from out of town. However, as the wildlife and wetland habitats became degraded and the bird populations declined, the organizers made the difficult decision to end the festival in 2024. No more birds, no more festival attendees and no more of their patronage of area accommodations and restaurants. HB 2977 would help prevent future losses, protect our environment and strengthen our economy.

Joseph Vaile

Ashland