



February 2, 2026

Office of Representative Ken Helm and Other State Representatives
Oregon State Legislature, House District 27
900 Court Street NE, H-490, Salem OR, 97301

RE: House Bill 4134 – Needs to Ensure Funding Accountability

Dear State Representatives:

The Habitat Institute supports funding for Oregon wildlife programs provided that strong accountability measures are in place. We are concerned that both House Bill 4134 and the Habitat Section of the Oregon Statewide Action Plan (SWAP) lack sufficient mechanisms to ensure program accountability.

To address this gap, HB 4134 should align with the Independent Scientific Review Panel's (ISRP) recommendations that Fish and Wildlife Programs:

1. clearly define goals and objectives,
2. calls for establishing consistent documentation to measure performance, particularly in maintaining conservation values and track habitat values consistently over time,
3. prioritize implementation, and
4. report regularly.

While Oregon's SWAP addresses what actions are needed and why, it does not adequately address how outcomes will be measured and documented. As a planning document, it should do so.

To correct this oversight, we recommend that HB 4134 require the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to use a proven, science-based approach it has successfully applied in the past: the Combined Habitat Assessment Protocols (CHAP). CHAP provides GIS-based habitat maps that quantify fish and wildlife biodiversity values based on species, habitats, and ecological functions. These maps can clearly document baseline and alternative conditions and allow for tracking consistent performance measurement over time. Examples are available upon request. [Please see 1.25 % Coalition Letter where it states in 2025 71% of Oregonians believe biodiversity needs to be protected; yet there is no method mentioned how to assess and track it].

CHAP has undergone multiple independent scientific reviews, including reviews following National Academy of Sciences procedures. It has been used by ODFW and the Pacific Northwest Power and Conservation Council, contributing to \$140 million in restitution from the Bonneville Power Administration for the Willamette Valley Wildlife Mitigation Agreement. It has also been applied by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, supporting nearly \$1 billion in federal project funding in California and New Mexico, as well as at multiple sites in Washington. CHAP is the "Best Available Science" for Oregon. The book that supports the fish and wildlife science is in the Smithsonian Institute Library.

The Habitat Institute urges the Legislature to address accountability in HB 4134 and stands ready to assist with implementation that promotes transparency, repeatability, and scalability in habitat performance tracking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Thomas A. O'Neill".

Thomas A. O'Neill
Director

Certified Wildlife Biologist