

To:

House Committee on Revenue
900 Court Street
Salem

Date: February 02, 2026

Sub: Testimony in support of HB 4134 (1.25% for Wildlife)

Chairs Rep Nathanson, Vice Chairs: Rep Reschke and Rep Jules Walters, and Members of the Committee

My name is Suze Wehr, and I am submitting this letter in support of **HB 4134 with the -1 amendment** on behalf of the Western Environmental Law Center. Since the 1990s, we have worked every day to protect our public lands, drinking water, communities, and threatened wildlife species through the power of U.S. law and litigation. Striving toward a thriving future for Oregon and states across the west, we identify ways to ensure this future through forward-thinking policies — policies like 1.25% for Wildlife.

HB 4134, also called 1.25% for Wildlife, fills a critical gap in our state’s ecological safeguards and public priorities. Oregon is home to some of the most unique yet vulnerable ecosystems in America. As of 2025, ODFW’s State Wildlife Action Plan has identified 320 species and 10 habitats as now requiring urgent conservation action to recover.¹ Each demonstrates the fragile connections between wild places and creatures and the ecosystem services that sustain the livelihoods of Oregonians. From agriculture to recreation and tourism, we all depend on the health of Oregon’s natural resources and therefore need to invest in them. As provided by the Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 496.012, “It is the policy of the State of Oregon that wildlife shall be managed to prevent serious depletion of any indigenous species and to provide the optimum recreational and aesthetic benefits for present and future generations of the citizens of this state.”²

Species and habitat recovery necessitates long-term planning with consistent, dedicated sources of funding to implement strategic programs without the risk of being cut short. Limited general fund allocations do not provide that stability. Additionally, funding for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) relies heavily on hunting/fishing sectors and federal grants, yet the financial contributions from both remains small and nonapplicable to most of our state’s imperiled wildlife, which are nongame species.

Current federal attempts to dismantle and defang bedrock environmental laws, including the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, add even greater urgency to the issue of biodiversity decline. With fewer national safeguards to steward at-risk species and critical habitat, states must uphold their own environmental legacies and advance solutions supporting the responsible management of vulnerable natural resources. Oregonians trust and

¹ *State Wildlife Action Plan Revision*, ODFW, <https://dfw.state.or.us/SWAP-Revision/> (last visited Feb. 2, 2026).

² **Oregon Revised Statutes § 496.012 (2023)**. General wildlife policy. https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_496.012

expect their elected officials to fund such efforts,³ but ODFW's minuscule budget allocation for conservation goals (~2%) cannot compete with today's environmental crises or the reality of federal withdrawal, leaving our state in dire need of additional funding.

For these reasons and more, HB 4134 offers a pragmatic solution for solving ODFW's historic and ongoing funding scarcity, a solution first proposed in 2016 when a task force organized by the legislature identified the Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) as a mechanism to address this problem. Now, ten years later, it is time to embrace this idea and bring it to fruition.

Raising the statewide tourism tax, or the TLT, was identified as a viable mechanism for addressing this critical conservation funding need in Oregon for the following reasons:

- a. Healthy abundant wildlife and ecosystems are an important part of Oregon's thriving - tourism industry. Outdoor recreation generates \$16 billion in total consumer spending annually, supporting 192,000 full and part-time jobs in Oregon and \$8 billion in wages.⁴ Oregon's hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching activities have accounted for \$1.2 billion in spending and have supported over 11,000 jobs in recent years.⁵ Protecting our biodiversity directly contributes to our tourism industry.
- b. The statewide tourism tax extends a significant portion of the tax burden (63%) to out-of-state visitors.⁶ This mechanism allows tourists to support recovery efforts for the biodiversity and outdoor experiences which often draw them to Oregon in the first place, and it does so while avoiding a cost-of-living increase for Oregon residents.
- c. Oregon has the third-lowest state TLT in the country,⁷ and the increase proposed by HB 4134 would maintain this third-lowest status.⁸ It is also a minimal increase at 1.25%, yet still capable of generating \$30 million per year to implement our State Wildlife Action Plan, also known as the Oregon Conservation Strategy and Nearshore Strategy.

In addition to funding the State Wildlife Action Plan, HB 4134 will support the implementation of several other key conservation programs, including the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, the Wildlife Stewardship program, Department of Justice anti-poaching efforts, invasive species management, ODFW's Wildlife Connectivity Program, and the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund. With the -1 amendment, 1.25% for Wildlife also invests in the Oregon Conservation Corps, supporting workforce development and wildfire risk reduction.

Oregon's economy and identity depend on the condition of its natural resources. Climate change is already elevating the risk of habitat loss and extinction. If we do not act now, the cost of restoring imperiled species and ecosystems will only intensify. Without long-term, meaningful

³ REPORT TO OREGON LEGISLATURE, *supra* note 1, at 14, 20.

⁴ *Earth Economics, Economic Analysis Of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon (2024)*, <https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/PRP/Documents/2024.07.17%20Economic%20analysis%20of%20outdoor%20recreation%20in%20OR%20-%202022%20update.pdf>

⁵ Oregon Dep't of Fish & Wildlife, Factsheet-Economic Impact OR Counties-Earth Economics (2019), <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/docs/Factsheet-Economic%20Impact%20OR%20Counties-Earth%20Economics%202019.pdf>.

⁶ Travel Oregon, *The Economic Impact of Travel* (April 2024), <https://industry.traveloregon.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Final-report-with-updated-clackamas-and-WV-numbers.pdf> (Page 16).

⁷ Oregon Revised Statutes 320.305, "Rate and Computation of Tax" https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_320.305; Oregon Revised Statutes 320.300 "ORS 320.300 Definitions for ORS 320.300 to 320.365" https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_320.300; 2024 HVS Lodging Tax Report – USA, HVS (Sept. 23, 2024), <https://www.hvs.com/article/10015-2024-hvs-lodging-tax-report-usa>.

⁸ 2024 HVS Lodging Tax Report – USA, HVS (Sept. 23, 2024), <https://www.hvs.com/article/10015-2024-hvs-lodging-tax-report-usa>.

investment in our watersheds, forests, and biodiversity, our world-renowned food and beverage sectors, outdoor recreation industry, and tourism opportunities cannot sustain themselves. And without diligent care for our wildlife neighbors and the wild places that sustain our mutual flourishing, Oregonians will lose far too much of what it means to call this remarkable state home.

We urge you to protect Oregon's natural heritage and future vitality by passing HB 4134 with the -1 amendment.

Thank you for your consideration,
Suze Wehr, Western Environmental Law Center