



Chair Rep Nathanson, Vice-Chair Rep Reschke, Vice Chair Rep Walters, and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

My name is Joe Liebezeit, and I'm the Statewide Conservation Director for the Bird Alliance of Oregon. On behalf of our over 12,000 members we urge you to please support passage of HB 4134 - "1.25 % for wildlife". The Bird Alliance of Oregon's mission is to "Inspire all people to love and protect birds, wildlife, and the natural environment upon which life depends." At 123 years old, we are the longest serving conservation organization in Oregon.

Increasing Oregon's statewide lodging tax by 1.25% would provide a sustainable source of funds to recover Oregon's most imperiled species and habitats and enhance biodiversity - all of which contribute to Oregon's tourism and outdoor recreation economy. The bulk of the tax revenue would be generated by out-of-state visitors (63%).<sup>1</sup> while still keeping the tax at one of the lowest in the country. Protecting Oregon's wildlife and habitats bolsters Oregon's robust outdoor tourism economy - 2.6% of the state's GDP - supports 192,000 jobs and \$16 billion in consumer spending. Investing in these resources now will continue to generate more economic opportunities for Oregon's communities in the future.

Visitors and tourists from around the world pay money in lodging, food and other fees to visit our state to view our amazing wildlife. This includes species like the iconic Tufted Puffin at Haystack Rock, elusive Greater Sage-Grouse leks in eastern Oregon, or to catch a fleeting view of the American Pika on a hike in the Cascades. If we want these species around in the coming decades we need to give them a helping hand. The species mentioned above are just the tip of the iceberg. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) recently updated their State Wildlife Action Plan ("SWAP" - formerly Oregon Conservation Strategy) and identified 321 species of greatest conservation need and 11 habitats of Conservation Concern. The at-risk species list has increased by 27 species since ODFW's last assessment in 2016. Despite this, current funding to implement the SWAP is only a tiny fraction of what we need to give these species and habitats a fighting chance. Habitat loss and degradation, a changing climate, invasive species, and other natural and human-made impacts are taking a heavy toll on Oregon's birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies, and bees.

Passage of the "1.25% for Wildlife" bill would set forward a bold, proactive solution that will help recover at-risk species now – a more efficient and cost-effective path forward rather than waiting until species are on the brink of extinction. This bill would establish the Recovering Oregon's Wildlife Fund. Funding will be used by ODFW to implement Oregon's SWAP to conserve and recover Oregon's most vulnerable wildlife and habitat and to ultimately keep our growing outdoor tourism industry thriving for generations to come.

The bill also funds:

- Wildfire protection via youth workforce development (Oregon Conservation Corps)
- State Police and Department of Justice on anti-poaching efforts
- Efforts to resolve wildlife - human conflicts through a Wildlife Stewardship Program
- Invasive plant species management
- Support ranchers for livestock lost due to wolf predation

We cannot have a thriving tourism economy without healthy and abundant fish, wildlife, and the habitats that support them. This legislation would ensure we have both. At a time when the federal government support for the state budget is waning, Oregon has a chance to set an example and protect our natural heritage. Doing so would make Oregon a national leader.

Please support HB 4134!

<sup>1</sup> 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).