

Submitter:

James Hammett

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB4134

HB 4134 is one of the most consequential conservation and rural-economic bills this Legislature will consider. It strengthens the funding base for Oregon's fish and wildlife, supports outdoor recreation, and stabilizes the natural assets that drive tourism across the state. The bill increases the statewide transient lodging tax and dedicates new revenue to wildlife conservation, invasive species response, anti-poaching efforts, wildlife connectivity, and the Oregon Conservation Corps.

These investments are not abstract—they directly support the landscapes, species, and outdoor experiences that bring visitors to Oregon and sustain rural economies like mine.

Oregon's Lodging Tax Is Low Compared to Neighboring States. Opponents sometimes argue that increasing the state lodging tax will harm tourism. The data show the opposite. Oregon currently has ****one of the lowest state lodging tax rates in the nation—third lowest among all 50 states****. Even with the proposed increase, Oregon would ****still remain below or significantly below**** comparable communities in surrounding states when local taxes are included.

Neighboring states routinely operate with higher combined lodging tax burdens while maintaining strong tourism sectors:

- ****Washington****: Local lodging taxes commonly push total rates well above Oregon's.
- ****Idaho****: State and local combined rates frequently exceed Oregon's current levels.
- ****California****: Local transient occupancy taxes often range from 10–15%, far above Oregon's statewide rate.

Oregon's competitive advantage in tourism is not its tax rate—it's our natural resources. HB 4134 protects the very thing visitors come here to experience.

Tourism Is a Rural Economic Engine. Outdoor recreation is an \$8 billion industry in Oregon, representing 2.6% of the state's GDP.

But in rural counties, the impact is even more pronounced. Visitors spend money on lodging, meals, fuel, guides, and local shops—dollars that circulate in communities with limited economic diversity.

In Grant County, Wheeler County, Harney County, tourism is one of the few sectors that reliably brings outside money into the local economy. But that tourism depends on healthy wildlife populations, intact habitats, and functioning ecosystems.

Wildlife Drives Tourism—and Wildlife Needs Stable Funding. HB 4134 directly supports:

- Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan**, the blueprint for recovering imperiled species and habitats.
- Wildlife connectivity projects**, which reduce vehicle collisions and maintain migration routes.
- Invasive species response**, protecting agriculture, forests, and waterways.
- Anti-poaching enforcement**, safeguarding the wildlife that hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers depend on.
- The Oregon Conservation Corps**, which reduces wildfire risk and builds a natural-resources workforce.

These programs are chronically underfunded, and the bill provides a stable, visitor-supported revenue stream without increasing the cost of living for Oregonians. In fact, 65% of the lodging tax is paid by out-of-state visitors.

Rural Communities Need This Bill. For rural counties, HB 4134 is not just a conservation bill—it is an economic development bill.

Healthy wildlife populations support hunting, fishing, bird-watching, photography, and outdoor recreation. Those activities bring visitors to small towns, fill local motels and campgrounds, and keep restaurants and gas stations open. When wildlife declines, rural economies feel it first.

HB 4134 recognizes that tourism and wildlife are inseparable, and that rural communities deserve a share of the benefits generated by the natural resources they steward.

Conclusion

HB 4134 is a balanced, forward-looking investment in Oregon's natural heritage and rural economies. It keeps Oregon competitive with surrounding states and strengthens the foundation of our tourism industry.