

To the Oregon House Committee on Revenue

Regarding: HB 4134

On Behalf of: Rogue Valley Audubon Society, Medford, Oregon

The Rogue Valley Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society based in Jackson County, Oregon. Our mission is to be “A Voice for Education and Conservation in the Natural World.” We strongly support HB 4134, and we urge the House Revenue Committee to advance this important legislation without delay.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has recently updated Oregon’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). Our region of southern Oregon retains outstanding examples of several Key Habitats prioritized in the SWAP: Grasslands, Oak Habitats, Flowing Water and Riparian Habitats, and Late Successional Mixed Conifer Forests.

The SWAP provides an excellent, scientifically rigorous roadmap for conserving our state’s wildlife species and habitats. However, dedicated funding is essential to move this vision into reality. ODFW is chronically underfunded, and it has virtually no resources to protect non-game and non-commercially-harvested species. Yet, these species comprise the vast majority of Oregon’s rich natural diversity, and are essential to the functioning of healthy, resilient ecosystems.

The SWAP identifies 320 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. These include 11 bird species with populations of statewide significance in southern Oregon, and which are thus of particular concern to the Rogue Valley Audubon Society:

- Chipping Sparrow
- Western Grasshopper Sparrow
- Great Gray Owl
- Lewis’s Woodpecker
- Northern Spotted Owl
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Oregon Vesper Sparrow
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Western Bluebird
- Western Meadowlark
- Wrentit

Without adequate funding, none of these species – or hundreds of others – will receive the study and protection they require. That is why HB 4134 is so important. It would increase the state’s current hotel and lodging taxes by 1.25%. In addition to funding the SWAP, it will provide much-needed money for the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, the Wolf Depredation Compensation Program, Invasive Species Response, ODFW’s Wildlife Connectivity Program, the Wildlife Stewardship Program, and the Oregon Conservation Corps. This increase would

bring the statewide hotel and lodging tax to only 2.5% overall – the third lowest in the country, and less than half of what Washington, Montana and Idaho charge.

Outdoor recreation is an \$8 billion industry in Oregon, contributing 2.6% of the state's GDP. The wildlife and habitats of our state are nationally known, and are a major draw for tourists. Studies indicate that 65% of those who pay the lodging tax are visitors from other states and countries. It is only fair that these visitors should contribute a small amount to conserving the natural beauty they have come to see.

Thank you for your attention to these comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Pepper W. Trail, Ph.D.
Conservation Co-Chair
Rogue Valley Audubon Society
Medford, Oregon