

Submitter: Anne Wenner
On Behalf Of: Anne Wenner
Committee: House Committee On Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4134

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As coordinator of the Winter Wings Festival in Klamath Falls for over 15 years, I was acutely aware of how essential healthy wildlife habitats were both to resident and migratory species and to our local economy. The Klamath Basin is commonly referred to as the Everglades of the West for good reason. It is an incredibly diverse complex of wetlands and uplands that supports numerous bird species year-round. Up to 1000 bald eagles, as well as many other raptor species, historically attracted by tens of thousands of migratory waterfowl and other birds, have been seen in the Klamath Basin. For over 42 years more than 500 people (over 60% from out of the county) braved winter conditions each February to come and experience the incredible wildlife viewing and photography opportunities our basin and its strategic position on the Pacific Flyway provided during the Winter Wings Festival. A significant number of these visitors stayed extra nights at local lodgings and data from post festival surveys showed that many of these attendees were planning on returning to the basin during other times of the year to experience the diverse wildlife the Klamath basin has to offer.

In the past few years, wildlife and especially wetland habitats in the basin have become highly degraded, fueled by climate change and competition for limited water resources. This dire situation is exacerbated by the current uncertainty surrounding future water supply and allocations and funding for habitat restoration.

Many of the at-risk bird species listed on ODFW's SWAP live in or migrate through the Klamath Basin. The collapse of the Pacific Flyway migration corridor and the subsequent massive decline in wildlife numbers in the basin has occurred in the past several years, and one of the unfortunate consequences of this was the cessation of the Winter Wings Festival. No birds, no visitors...

I strongly believe that approving HB 4134 would provide an excellent, reliable funding stream for recovering habitats for at-risk species. This in turn would encourage the return of both wildlife and visitors to the Klamath Basin.

Anne Wenner