

House Committee on Revenue:

Rep. Nancy Nathanson

Rep E. Werner Reschke

Rep Jules Walters

Rep Zach Hudson

Rep Bobby Levy

Rep Pam Marsh

Rep Gregory Smith

February 4, 2026

Re: HB 4134

Baker County Commissioner Christina Witham, Baker County Natural Resources Advisory Committee, and the Baker County Natural Resources Director vehemently oppose HB 4134 on multiple fronts. This testimony to the House Committee on Revenue is regarding the financial impacts this bill will have to Baker County.

Baker County is a natural resources/agriculture based economy. It has been this way since the first settlers discovered gold, abundant forests, and fertile farm ground. In the 1990s, the loss of the timber industry caused a devastating economic catastrophe. The County went from having a family-wage paying sawmill in each community to absolutely none at all. Businesses closed, schools closed or combined, and many families moved away.

HB 4134 will continue the County's decline by funding the same groups that have contributed to loss in timber harvests. For example, in 2019 36,700 acres were proposed for vegetation management on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Environmental groups successfully litigated against the project causing it to stop. Not only does this deny the opportunity for timber harvesters, processors, and suppliers to get income from the harvest, it also leaves a huge swath of forest at risk to wildfire due to disease, insects, and overstocking. The estimated cost of the loss of this project alone is in the millions of dollars. A catastrophic wildfire in the area will add several millions of dollars in cost to the County, state, and federal agencies and untold nonmonetary damages to the ecosystem.

Another example of environmental groups damaging the economic viability, the health, safety and welfare of county citizens is through their protests against actions to address forest health in the Baker City Watershed. Because of their interference, especially related to the protection of white pine, the project was reduced to a point that it may, or may not, reduce catastrophic wildfire that would decimate the community's drinking water. None of the group's members live or work in Baker City, yet they put an entire community in jeopardy. Should a wildfire burn

through the Baker City watershed, a new treatment plant will cost well over \$75 million dollars – a cost the community cannot afford.

It is expected that with additional funding, provided by the State through the use of lodging tax funds, many more acres are going to be locked up in the name of conservation. Environmental groups already are well funded through the federal Equal Access to Justice Act which has allowed litigation to stop forest health projects in the name of conservation. They certainly do not need any additional funding.

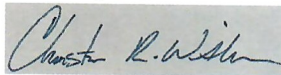
It's truly ironic that HB 4134 would not only fund environmental groups, but it would also fund a wolf depredation fund. However, not long ago, these same environmental groups were trying to keep the wolf listed and not compensate livestock producers for their losses. There's no reason that with additional funding they won't try that again. It's truly a bizarre combination for the bill.

The bill touts that it is 'tourism' that will pay for the conservation. However, it's going to be difficult for tourists to enjoy the outdoors when they have no access to them because they're shut down due to 'saving' a species or 'conserving' a forest. The loss of tourism will be the nail in Baker County's economic coffin.

Please, stop and think about the economic impact to local communities when you discuss the revenue impacts that come with HB 4134. It's not just about how well the state will do with increasing the lodging tax, it's about how badly it's going to affect the economies of counties and their citizens.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chester R. Wilson", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.

Baker Co Commissioner

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anni Brunland", is written in a cursive style.

Baker Co Natural Resources Director
541-519-1719