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February 4, 2026

Chair Nathanson

House Committee on Revenue
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Subject: Opposition to HB 4134 (in its current form) — Support for the mission, concern with funding mechanism

Dear Chair Nathanson and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

I am writing to express **qualified opposition** to House Bill 4134. I strongly support the *intent* of the bill — establishing stable, long-term funding for wildlife conservation and habitat recovery — and I appreciate the Legislature’s leadership in addressing these urgent needs. However, I respectfully oppose **funding this work through an increase to Oregon’s transient lodging tax.**

I offer these comments informed by **more than 20 years working in the tourism and lodging industry**, and by my professional role as a lodging provider and a **specialist in rural tourism development in Oregon**. My work focuses on helping small, often fire- and disaster-impacted communities build sustainable local economies that depend heavily on overnight visitation.

From this perspective, I am deeply concerned that increasing the statewide lodging tax will **negatively affect lodging demand**, particularly in rural areas where tourism margins are thin and price sensitivity is high.

While the proposed increase may appear modest in isolation, it must be understood in the context of **stacked lodging taxes**. In many Oregon destinations, the state lodging tax is added on top of local transient room taxes, tourism improvement district fees, and other assessments. In aggregate, visitors in some markets already face lodging taxes approaching or exceeding those of peer destinations in the western United States.

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In my experience, **lodging taxes directly influence traveler behavior**, especially for:

- Price-sensitive leisure travelers
- Group travel and small conferences
- Shoulder-season and off-peak visits
- Rural destinations competing with nearby states or regions

Higher total room costs can reduce length of stay, shift travel to alternative destinations, or discourage trips entirely. For rural communities, where tourism often supports local employment, restaurants, guides, retail, and essential services, even small reductions in overnight stays can have outsized economic consequences.

It is also important to recognize that Oregon's lodging industry already plays a unique role in funding statewide tourism promotion. Transient lodging taxes help support Travel Oregon and regional destination marketing organizations, which in turn **drive demand for overnight stays**. Reducing demand through higher taxes risks undermining the very revenue stream being used to fund conservation.

I want to be clear: **I support the work this bill aims to accomplish.** Healthy ecosystems and wildlife are foundational to Oregon's quality of life and to the visitor experiences that attract people to our state in the first place. My concern is not with the goal, but with placing the financial burden disproportionately on overnight visitors and the lodging operators who serve them.

I respectfully urge the Committee to consider **alternative funding mechanisms** that do not rely on increased transient lodging taxes, such as:

- General Fund appropriations
- User-based or activity-specific fees tied more directly to resource use
- Broad-based revenue options that distribute cost more equitably

By decoupling this essential conservation funding from lodging taxes, the Legislature can protect both Oregon's natural resources **and** the rural tourism economies that depend on them.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our state.

Respectfully,



Chris LaVoie

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Executive Director - McKenzie River Community Partnership a non-profit community development company.