

Testimony in Support of HB 4134

Chair Nathanson and members of the House Committee on Revenue:

I write as a wildlife conservation professional and lifelong Oregonian in strong support of HB 4134, which would increase Oregon's Transient Lodging Tax by 1.25% to protect wildlife and habitats for future generations.

The Oregon experience is a wildlife experience. From the misty spout of a gray whale to the flutter of bats at dusk, a tidepool sea star discovery and the squeak of a pika in the Gorge, these moments define our state and draw visitors from around the world. Yet many of these species now need our help.

Oregon's biodiversity is at a tipping point. The 2025 State Wildlife Action Plan identifies 320 species whose declines signal broader ecosystem stress and increased risk of federal listing. These species are not only part of our natural heritage; they are indicators of ecosystem health that support our economy, outdoor traditions and resilient landscapes.

Tribes, landowners, local governments, conservation organizations and other Oregonians are actively working to restore our habitats and wildlife. However, these efforts cannot succeed at the necessary scale without reliable, statewide funding. Today, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife relies heavily on hunting and fishing license revenue, an outdated and insufficient model that no longer reflects who benefits from conservation or the scope of modern challenges, including habitat loss, invasive species and climate change.

Stable, dedicated funding allows Oregon to act early, keeping common species common, avoiding costly endangered species listings and preventing the economic and regulatory consequences of ecosystem collapse. Proactive conservation is both more effective and far more cost-efficient than crisis response.

The economic case is clear. Wildlife-based recreation generates about \$1.2 billion annually in Oregon and supports more than 11,000 jobs. Wildlife watching alone contributes \$579 million in direct spending and \$23.5 million in state and local tax revenue each year. Declining wildlife populations would directly threaten these benefits, particularly in rural communities and outdoor-based economies.

HB 4134 offers a fair, forward-looking solution. An estimated 65–70% of Transient Lodging Tax revenue is paid by out-of-state visitors, allowing those who enjoy Oregon's natural beauty to share in the responsibility of protecting it. This approach aligns with the growing concept of regenerative tourism, where tourism revenue is reinvested in the landscapes that attract visitors.

HB 4134 is a practical and equitable investment in Oregon's wildlife, economy, and long-term resilience. For these reasons, I strongly support its passage. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Shervin Hess