

To House Revenue Committee:

I strongly urge you support and vote yes on HB 4134. For 26 years I worked in a variety of positions for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), with the last four years as the Director of the agency. My experiences as a wildlife conservation leader gave me a broad perspective on how our populations of fish and wildlife have changed over the years. I observed and experienced the rapid loss of habitat and direct impacts to animals through poaching, loss of essential habitats to development, spread of invasive species, increased mining, poor forest management, and more recently, climate change and the devastation of wildfires. HB 4134 may be the last life-line for the hundreds of fish and wildlife species in Oregon currently in decline or needing help to secure adequate habitat to sustain populations into the future.

ODFW is required to maintain viable and stable wildlife populations throughout the State. In 2006 ODFW developed its first State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) approved by their Commission and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, a requirement necessary to apply for federal funding. Through its development and updates over the last 20 years, the SWAP, formerly called the Oregon Conservation Plan, has been held up as one of the best plans in the country, and a standard that other states looked to as a model. The SWAP addresses the needs of the myriads of species that are not hunted or fished, but has never had an adequate or consistent funding base to implement the plan. A significant portion of ODFW's budget comes from the sale of hunting and fishing license and tag fees which funds related existing base programs with little available dollars for other species. HB 4134 addresses many of these concerns; most importantly the implementation of ODFW's SWAP.

As many of you know, this is not the first time requests have been made to the Legislature for nongame funding. Attempts to generate funds from the sale of outdoor gear and wildlife watching supplies such as bird seed and binoculars fell flat. Vehicle license plate revenue, optional tax check-off donations and habitat stamps sales over the last 20 years have had limited success with no long-term provisions. What comparatively few general fund dollars provided to ODFW for critical nongame and habitat work in the past were radically reduced by the legislature in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Some programs were eliminated. HB 4134 eliminates the fight for limited general fund or lottery dollars, rectifies past funding shortfalls and now has bipartisan support to finally address and turn the corner on long-term funding needs of hundreds of declining wildlife species.

As a wildlife biologist in the 70's and 80's, I worked closely with those involved with wildlife and people conflicts. To solve the problems, negotiations with few exceptions resulted in compromising wildlife and their habitats that could never be reversed. Since then, development

continues to spread across the state, energy needs are creating solar farms covering square miles instead of acres, wildfires are eliminating hundreds of thousands of acres of important habitat annually with more anticipated this year. Federal land environmental policies and habitat restoration programs are being reduced and, in some cases, eliminated. Directives to federal land managers are once again focused on extractive practices for the short-term economic gain at the expense of long-term wildlife losses. The negative impacts to wildlife and their habitats are growing at exponential rates and will continue to do so. We are now at a point where there is little to no room to compromise what's left of a precious natural resource.

A 2006 survey conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service showed that over 1.5 million Oregonians participated in wildlife watching. Then and now, wildlife watching generates millions of dollars towards the state's economy and has a positive impact on job creation. Vast numbers of outdoor enthusiasts want to see this bill passed, including hunters and anglers of Oregon so they know these species have a chance for the future as well as the future of their recreational opportunities. Those opposed to HB 4134 are short sighted in their belief that tourism will drop in Oregon, and people will not come to their events due to a 1.25% increase on lodging fees. Oregon has one of the lowest transient lodging taxes in the country even with this proposed increase. The tradeoff between paying an extra \$3.75 for a \$300 room and seeing many of Oregon's species become listed as Threatened or Endangered or even worse, going extinct, would be self-serving for the few, at the expense of the many.

Now is the time to act positively on HB 4134. Bipartisan support remains and with the addition of changes to last year's bill, a number of concerns have been addressed making the bill even stronger and gaining more public support. Oregon needs your leadership now on an issue that has been before the legislature many times in the past with very little success. Looking back over the last 50 years of my involvement in natural resource protection I am deeply concerned about our wildlife's future. Please take this opportunity to do what is needed and what is right for Oregonians and for Oregon's fish and wildlife resources. Vote YES on HB 4134.

Thank you,

Jim Greer