

Submitter: Kyle Collins
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Finance and Revenue
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB4134

Hello,

My name is Kyle Collins and I am writing as a resident of Bend, Oregon to reaffirm my strong support for House Bill 4134. I previously submitted comments in support of this bill during the House process, but I feel it is imperative to redouble my support for the proposal. Similar to a previous bill that advanced, but ultimately fell short during the last legislative session, HB 4134 would increase the state lodging tax by 1.25% and provide dedicated, sustainable funding to help restore some of our most vulnerable wildlife and their natural habitats.

The State of Oregon is a nationally (and internationally) renowned as a place where iconic landscapes are filled with native wildlife.

Our state identity is deeply tied to these natural treasures, and important sectors of our substantial outdoor recreation economy are specifically tied to healthy populations of native wildlife, whether through hunting, fishing, or simply tourism from people hoping to spot wild animals in a natural setting. Unfortunately, Oregon is behind many of our neighboring western states when it comes restoring and managing our wildlife resources, as we have seen a continued downward trend for certain iconic wildlife populations such as mule deer as our state continues to deal with changing land use patterns, increased traffic, invasive species, droughts, and larger and more destructive wildfires.

Just for some context that affects me locally, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife estimates that mule deer in our region, one of our quintessential central Oregon animals, have declined 40-60% since the 1990s through a combination of vehicle strikes, increased development, climatic and fire regime changes, and disease. If we want our wildlife populations to thrive for future generations, that will require dedicated financial investments in conservation to protect and restore critical habitats, establish wildlife corridors, and scientifically directed programs to recover struggling wildlife species.

Given the draw for so many visitors to our state is specifically tied to wildlife and natural habitats, the proposed bill is a common-sense solution to use those same economic drivers as a way to begin protecting and restoring our cherished wildlife. For context, the outdoor economy contributes 2.6% of Oregon's GDP, supports more than 192,000 jobs, and generates \$16 billion in consumer spending. An increase of 1.25% to the state's transient lodging tax is a metaphorical drop in the bucket in terms of actual cost increases for visitors to state, but would have immense benefits for our vulnerable wildlife. Given the uncertainty around federal wildlife recovery programs, state leadership is especially important right now. By passing this

bill, Oregon can set an national example for how states can proactively protect biodiversity, support wildlife stewardship, and sustain healthy wildlife populations for sportsmen, for the ecosystems services they provide on a daily basis, and simply for their own right to share our landscape.

As a proud citizen of Central Oregon, I know firsthand how lucky I am to live in such a spectacular location surrounded by abundant natural resources. One of the primary reasons I chose to make my life here is because of the access to incredible outdoor spaces and opportunity to interact with wild creatures whether through fishing on the Deschutes River, exploring the High Desert beauty of Steens and Hart Mountains, or rafting down the Grand Ronde River, these have all been places of exceptional beauty which have made an indelible impact on my life. As a new father, I also intend to share these same places and experiences with my son and I hope he has the same opportunity to see herd of pronghorn running through the sagebrush or healthy populations of native trout and salmon on the Metolius river. Passing this legislation makes that much more of a possible reality in the future.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my comments.