

March 17, 2021

Chair Brad Witt and Committee Members  
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

**RE: VOTE YES ON H.B. 2844**

Dear Chair Witt and Committee Members:

On behalf of Animal Wellness Action, the Center for A Humane Economy, and Animal Wellness Action, I urge you to vote YES on H.B. 2844, the bill to give our state's beleaguered state animal, the American beaver, a much-needed degree of protection.

**1. Beavers Play a Vital Role in Their Ecosystems as Keystone “Engineers” and Umbrella Species.**

While they deserve a certain level of respect as our state animal, beavers also play an important role in the ecosystems that they occupy. Beavers are both a keystone species (although a better term may be a keystone engineer) and an umbrella species. As a keystone species, beavers create and modify their habitat structure in ways that benefit other species. As an umbrella species, a focus on their protection will provide benefits to other species within that same ecosystem.

Through their engineering, beavers create wetlands that are hubs of biodiversity. Animals such as boreal toads, otters, and trout benefit from beaver ponds. Their ponds also provide breeding grounds for wood ducks, nesting areas for trumpeter swans, and perches for songbirds in the willows irrigated by the ponds. In addition, beavers help alleviate the effects of climate change as their ponds capture rainfall and help to keep streams full as the planet warms.

Humans have decimated native salmon runs by their construction of hydroelectric dams, whereas the dams created by beavers help to sustain salmon. The beavers' dams create pools as well as slow-water side channels, which are important for young salmon to rest, feed, and find protection from predators.

Beavers also serve a similar role as that of forests, which absorb carbon from the atmosphere and store it as wood, as they create carbon stores through the deposit of sediment at the bottom of their ponds.

## **2. Beavers Must Be Managed For The Benefit Of All Oregonians**

Beavers are wildlife and as such, are held in public trust and should be managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, not the Oregon Department of Agriculture. ORS 498.002 specifically declares that wildlife is the property of the state, and beavers add to the cultural, recreational, economic and aesthetic values of our great state. One BBC article valued a beaver at \$120,000, based on its engineering abilities that change the environment to benefit people (this value was based on a study done by ECONorthwest out of Portland). Beavers help to mitigate damage to the environment wrought by the agricultural use of synthetic fertilizers by trapping runoff nearer to its source and encouraging bacteria that convert nitrates to harmless gas, thereby helping to prevent these chemicals from reaching the ocean where they lead to low-oxygen "dead zones," which are deadly to marine life.

Beavers also contribute to a healthy groundwater system as the weight of their ponds forces water to percolate through the ground, thereby recharging aquifers and raising water tables for all. Many opponents of this bill cite beavers as the cause of flooding, however, a beaver's pond can actually help to prevent large flood events as it stores water as well as slowing it down and spreading it over a larger surface area.

The current statute allows unlimited trapping with no accountability measures, which is inhumane as there is no requirement for the monitoring of traps. We know that traps are indiscriminate killers, taking many more species than the "problem" beaver that a landowner may be trying to target.

## **3. Respectful Co-existence is the Answer**

Currently, Oregon law makes it easier and more cost effective to kill beavers rather than find ways to co-exist with and even accommodate them. HB 2844 will help provide a mechanism to move towards responsible non-lethal conflict resolution between these keystone engineers and agricultural interests. While relocating beavers is one nonlethal way to deal with beavers, there are also methods such as wrapping trees with fencing or installing flow devices that have shown to be effective in approximately 80% of conflicts between beaver and humans.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge you to vote YES on H.B. 2844. Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the people and wildlife of Oregon.

Sincerely yours,

Scott Beckstead  
Director of Campaigns  
541-530-3460