

I strongly urge support for HB 2844 to remove beavers from predatory animal status in Oregon. Since beavers have been returning to many areas of the state after almost total removal in the last few centuries, scientists have learned a lot in Oregon about the importance of beavers as a critical component of our ecological health. Beavers' contributions include improving the health of our rivers and riparian habitat by increasing wetlands and ponds that store surface and groundwater, improving drinking water quality and stream temperatures, and increasing wildfire resilience through natural and effective firebreaks and post-fire habitat. In turn, by improving water quality and stream temperatures, they have improved habitat for multiple imperiled salmonid species.

This bill creates a balanced approach for managing beavers in Oregon by allowing the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to manage beaver responsibly and based on their expertise, just as it does for most of the other wildlife in Oregon including deer, elk, black bear, wolves, raccoons, fish and others. It encourages the use of non-lethal coexistence tools to prevent property and infrastructure damage caused by beavers and maintains current tools for landowners including the lethal removal of beavers if necessary. Fundamentally, it returns management of beavers to the experts at ODFW while not precluding Oregon Dept of Agriculture from working with landowners to protect their property, crops and infrastructure.

I have been privileged to work on environmental stewardship projects on some of the desert rivers of central Oregon to help restore beaver habitat and have seen, firsthand, the impact of beavers returning to these rivers. Desert rivers without beavers become ditches with little vegetation, scouring deeper and deeper into the ground, decreasing the natural pooling and meandering of these rivers and reducing the amount of water, both on the surface and in the groundwater, retained in the local ecosystem. When beavers return, they create structures that slow the water down and spread it over a wider area, increasing and improving the riparian habitat, improving the eco-system for the fish as well as plants and animals that depend on the rivers. Beavers are now known to be a critical keystone species for these habitats, particularly in the desert where water is always a critical resource.

Please support passage of HB 2844 for the benefit of all who depend on the rivers of Oregon. Thank you.

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