

Dear Chair Golden and Committee members:

On behalf of Wildwood Farm Sanctuary & Preserve, I write to urge you to protect the health of both people and wildlife in Oregon by supporting SB 832, the bill to end mink farming in Oregon and assisting affected mink producers. Wildwood Farm Sanctuary & Preserve is a 501c3, GFAS-accredited farm animal sanctuary and nature preserve dedicated to protecting native plants and animals while providing life-long, peaceful refuge and rehabilitation for abused and neglected farm animals. We are committed to the mission of celebrating and advocating for our native species as well as the welfare of animals raised on farms. Because mink are both a native species and one raised on cruel factory farms, we feel compelled to speak out on the issue of mink farms and their role as reservoirs for diseases that pose a very real danger to people and wild creatures alike.

In their natural state, wild mink are solitary, semi-aquatic animals that roam over vast territories as important members of their ecosystem. Raising tens of thousands of these animals in cramped, crowded conditions in barren wire cages is not only fundamentally inhumane, it also creates an unnatural environment that enables the easy spread of disease, including diseases that pose a threat to human health. The very fact that mink farms face devastating losses every time there is an outbreak of an infectious disease should be all the proof we need that mink do not belong on factory farms. Denmark, the world's top producer of mink, acknowledged this fact when it shut down over 1,100 mink farms and culled all 17 million of its captive mink.

When coronavirus struck a mink farm in Oregon, state authorities trapped three mink that had escaped the farm and discovered that two of those animals tested positive for the disease. This is especially alarming because the virus uses the immune system of mink to mutate into variants that pose a threat to other species the animals may come into contact with. For this reason, it is entirely foreseeable that in addition to being able to infect mink farm farmers, workers, and their families, infected farmed mink that escape may also spread the disease to wild species, especially native mustelids like wild mink, fishers, river otters, and pine martens. It is equally foreseeable that an infected wild animal with a mutated variant of the virus could transmit the disease back to any humans they come in contact with, whether an outdoor enthusiast, a trapper, or other members of the public. SB 832 is therefore important not just to protect human health, but also the health of our own wildlife species.

Most Americans have sworn off wearing fur. Mink farms are not producing a necessary product; the mink pelts produced in Oregon are being exported to other countries where fur is still worn. The mink farming industry has been in steady decline for many years. We can no longer afford to put the health of Oregon's people and wildlife at risk for the sake of a dying industry that serves foreign luxury markets. Please do the responsible thing and vote YES on SB 832 and move the bill to the full Senate with a "do pass" recommendation.

Thank you for considering our views, and for your service to the people of Oregon.

Michelle Blake
Vice President
Wildwood Sanctuary and Preserve