



To Senate Committee on Natural Resources
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon

Sub: Testimony in support of HB 3464

Date: 04.26.2023

Chair Marsh, Vice Chairs Levy and Levy and Members of the Committee

This testimony is submitted by the Oregon Wildlife Coalition in support of HB 3464 to remove beavers from the “predatory animal” statute under ORS 610.002 so that Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife can manage beavers for the benefits beavers provide to Oregonians by reducing and mitigating climate change impacts. Members of the Oregon Wildlife Coalition include Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Oregon Wild, Portland Audubon, and Western Environmental Law Center.

The public hearing as well as other submitted testimonies will give you a detailed insight into the diverse and complex benefits that beavers provide in their ecosystems. These benefits have ripple effects that extend beyond where beavers are located. This includes wetlands and meadows created by beavers that act as natural carbon capture-and-storage areas by extracting large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere; habitat for fish and wildlife species including imperiled species like salmon because beaver modified habitats are less sensitive to short term climate variability and beaver ponds and wetlands contribute to cooler stream temperatures. Beaver created wetlands and meadows also create natural fire breaks and provide climate refugia to wildlife and livestock.

Current beaver management: why predatory animal

All of the above-mentioned contributions make beaver a keystone species, that is, a species whose impact on the ecosystem is significantly larger than their population size suggests – if they are gone, other species are likely to follow. Yet, as the Beaver State, we have a disjointed approach to beaver management which makes it difficult to measure and utilize benefits from

beavers on a landscape. Beavers are classified as “Rodentia” under scientific classification system because of which they got included in Oregon’s predatory animal statute (the statute includes all rodents). But beavers do not predate on other animals, they are strictly herbivores. Yet, their classification has created a myriad of confusion in their management, such as:

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) manages beavers on public lands as “furbearers” and has a hunting and trapping season.
- Separately, Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) manages beavers on private lands as “predatory animal” in that killing beavers is allowed with no limits, reporting and no monitoring. Beavers can be killed all year round on private lands without any permit.
- Recently, the Private Forest Accord carved out a piece of beaver management on private forested lands where ODFW will have some information on beavers killed on private forested lands because of a reporting process.

This goes to show what a chaotic patchwork it is when it comes to beaver management in the Beaver State. If we are responding to beaver damage by handing their management to ODA, then as a state we need to evaluate how we can manage beavers for the scientifically-proven benefits that they provide. If we divide everything by agency then managing water quality and accessibility benefits should go to Department of Environmental Quality and Water Resources Department, managing wildfire benefits should go to Department of Forestry and so on. Or, we can hand their management to the agency that is responsible for managing the species in the first place – ODFW.

What HB 3464 aims to achieve:

HB 3464 is trying to achieve three things:

- Simplify beaver management into a single state agency for improved and more informed management.
- Close data collection gaps outlined by State and Federal agencies, public stakeholders and the Beaver Working Group for more informed management of beaver.
- Empower landowners with guidance on voluntary coexistence solutions.

This will allow us to have a better and more comprehensive approach to managing beavers and make critical management decision on where beaver presence need to be prioritized in order to address climate change impacts like wildfire and drought. It is not just about how many beavers we have in the state (which we do not know) – it is also about where they are located and where they are being killed in response to damage.

What HB 3464 does not do:

It does not prevent landowners’ ability to kill beavers in response to damage on private lands. If this bill passes, beavers will move into the “furbearer” category (they are already classified as such on public lands) where, in addition to the hunting and trapping season for furbearers, **landowners can contact ODFW for a permit all year round** to lethally remove beavers in response to damage. ODFW already has a permit issuing process for other furbearers that can

cause damage including foxes, bobcats and raccoons. ODFW field staff can issue a permit as quickly as in half hour after a landowner contacts a field personnel. It merely adds a step of point of contact with ODFW field staff and opens the door to a possible conservation on voluntary non-lethal methods that can prevent conflicts in the future. It is an additional resource for landowners when they need information on such tools and techniques. Additionally, HB 3464 makes provisions for landowners to take beaver without permit and report after, if there is an imminent threat to infrastructure or crops.

Finally, HB 3464 protects the provisions of the Private Forest Accord. That is, the agreement among stakeholders through the Private Forest Accord will be upheld wherever it applies and HB 3464 will not.

The Fish and Wildlife Commission in our state is the oversight body for ODFW. While different stakeholder groups may have disagreed with the Commission's decision on a given issue, we do not undermine the value of such a body and recognize the role of the Commission in wildlife management in the state, and beaver is such a wildlife species.

We conclude with the hope that our comment letter gives you enough information that highlights the importance of beavers on Oregon's landscapes and their role in protecting these landscapes for current and future generations of Oregonians. HB 3464 is a path forward in the right direction.

Thanking you

Cascadia Wildlands

Oregon Wild

Center for Biological Diversity

Western Environmental Law Center

Humane Society of the United States

Humane Voters Oregon

Defenders of Wildlife

Portland Audubon