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Michelle Emmons  
Riverkeeper &  
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Oregon House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment  
In Support of HB 2980 – Wildlife Stewardship Program Bill  
February 4, 2025

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Willamette Riverkeeper, an Oregon 501(c)(3) nonprofit with approximately 7,000 members and supporters, submits the following testimony in support of HB 2980, the Wildlife Stewardship Program bill. Since 1996, Willamette Riverkeeper has proudly served as the eyes, ears, and voice of the Willamette River Basin waters. The Willamette, Santiam, Molalla, Clackamas, Tualatin, Yamhill, Calapooia, McKenzie, Long Tom, and Luckiamute Rivers are not just important for fishing and recreation, but also four our threatened salmonid habitat, our wildlife, and our fellow Oregonians in the Willamette Valley who rely on these waters for their drinking water.

Heather King

Willamette Riverkeeper is driven to protect the rivers, creeks, tributaries, and side channels of the entire Basin, and our conservation and cleanup programs enable us and our volunteers to generate positive change for the Willamette River. We believe in a river with excellent water quality and abundant habitat, and safe for fishing and recreation. We believe this is a fundamental public right.

We support HB 2980 which will provide a proactive solution to increasing threats our precious wildlife faces. Oregon's wildlife is increasingly threatened by habitat loss, climate change, and expanding human development. These pressures are forcing people and wildlife into closer contact, leading to costly and preventable conflicts that not only put animals and communities at risk, but also reduces public support for conservation. This bill would shift our state's approach from reactive to proactive and will help Oregonians and wildlife live together more peacefully.

Prevention is far more effective and cost-efficient than reaction and will help save wildlife and protect communities as opposed to cleaning up the aftermath of these conflicts. Current wildlife management often relies on short-term, lethal responses to conflicts, which fails to address the root

causes of these conflicts. Investing in proactive strategies reduces long-term costs for communities, landowners, and wildlife agencies.

The three wildlife coexistence biologists who would be hired if this bill passes will provide consistent, effective guidance to help prevent conflicts before they escalate, both reducing the number of conflicts overall and decreasing the severity of these conflicts when they do arise. Oregon also needs to strengthen its wildlife rehabilitation network to save the wildlife that gets caught in these conflicts, which this bill does. Wildlife rehabilitation centers provide critical care for injured and displaced wildlife, including listed wildlife, but currently lacks sufficient and sustainable funding. Supporting these organizations allows them to continue their essential work and helps protect wildlife.

As human development expands, ensuring wildlife remains wild and minimizing human/wildlife conflict is crucial for maintaining Oregon's ecological balance. Education the public on best practices for coexistence will help reduce unnecessary interactions and promotes long-term stewardship. The Wildlife Stewardship Program will ensure a coordinated response across Oregon, benefitting urban, suburban, and rural areas alike.

This bill is good for all Oregonians and the wildlife that calls our state home. Willamette Riverkeeper urges the House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment to pass this bill and allow it to keep moving through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

Michelle Emmons  
Interim Executive Director & Riverkeeper  
Willamette Riverkeeper  
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