



On behalf of Greater Hells Canyon Council and the NE Oregon Beaver Working Group (focused on Baker, Union, and Wallowa Counties) I would like to offer our full support of HB 3143 (Landowners Living with Beavers).

On Oregon's "dry side" we think about water a lot. How do we keep it in the system for the benefit of our communities, the flora and fauna who depend on it, and the ranchers and farmers who wouldn't be able to feed us or maintain their livelihoods without it.

The effects from decades without robust beaver populations and incised streams can be seen everywhere. There are affordable and effective coexistence strategies and some of the important coexistence work is already underway through education campaigns and on-the-ground assistance by groups across the state like the NE Oregon Beaver Working Group with the help of limited private funding.

We need state support for continuing these efforts. These acts are important for the health of our ecosystems to weather the extremes of climate change. More cold water kept higher in the river system for longer is only a positive for every person and animal - we all rely on this critical resource.

In the age of climate change causing more extreme weather conditions and therefore more extreme wildfire events - water in our upper system watersheds is more critical than ever and more of a challenge than ever. We can get loads of snow in the winter or rain in the spring but if it doesn't stay in the system until late July, August, and September then we are in a tough spot. When we look at strategies that help increase water latency (keeping water in the system longer), beavers are very high on the list of priorities for us. Allow them to be where they want and we all benefit, hence our emphasis on beaver coexistence.

Beavers can make a huge difference in a very dry river channel. Once beavers are allowed to live in a stretch of the stream and reconnect it to its historic floodplain that the water no longer rushes right by and downstream but rather is slowed in the beaver ponds having the opportunities to recharge groundwater systems and surface water tables for release later in the season once the snowpack melt has been depleted.

NE Oregon Beaver Working Group currently has limited-time funding from a private foundation to hold a fund to cover or supplement the training of coexistence practitioners that are qualified to respond to "problem beaver" calls. And funds to cover or supplement the cost of coexistence mitigation strategies – such as pond levelers, wrapping or painting trees or excluding beavers from culverts. Another solution is paying a small fee directly to a landowner to cover the lost crop proceeds associated with allowing beavers to flood a very nominal portion of their property.

We launched a website with a hotline that landowners can call to get in touch with a practitioner if they see beaver signs or are having issues. We also do outreach to landowners directly where we know there have been beavers trapped – something we anticipate will be easier to know after the passage of the beaver bill in the 2023 session requiring permits for beaver removal – thank you!





The main thing I'd like to emphasize is that while all of the low tech solutions are incredibly important and great to have in your toolbox, these conversations local practitioners are having with landowners are critical. We have also found that our biggest need is staff capacity to mount this pro-beaver educational campaign -- let landowners know what can be done to live with beavers, actually assist or complete projects on private lands, and continue the conversation afterward to make sure the coexistence balance is properly struck.

So far the biggest impact we are seeing is in just having conversations with landowners who are "beaver curious" can be a huge help. There are many myths out there about beavers – like they are eating all the fish and stealing all the water when in fact they do the opposite on both fronts. And there are so many fun, positive attributes to share about beavers not only as our water warriors but that they live in partners and care for and raise their families for years just like us – they're very sweet.

I believe keeping the efforts local is key to success. A great example is Ian Wilson, with the Grande Ronde Model Watershed, has beavers on his own property which gives him a great connection point to talk to others from a shared firsthand experience and gives our coalition a great demonstration site to actually show other landowners what it could look like for them to live with beavers. Ian says he thinks many landowners just want to be heard. He said it takes him multiple conversations over time to start to turn the mindset of someone who has traditionally just called Wildlife Service or a private contractor to trap their "problem beavers". These same folks can become intrigued by a durable solution that doesn't require them shelling out a few hundred or even thousands of dollars every year and allows them to keep a beaver in their stream, get those critical water retention benefits for themselves and their downstream neighbors, but without the damage they have grown to associate with beavers.

Thank you so much for this bill and your interest in helping place-based organizations and partnerships like ours have funding to have these critical conversations, get training, purchase supplies, and provide solutions to landowners that benefit the beavers, the humans, and the entire ecosystems we all depend upon.

Respectfully submitted by:

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