



To:

House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water
900 Court Street
Salem

Date: February 21, 2025

Sub: Testimony in support of HB 2977 (1% for Wildlife)

Co-Chairs Rep Helm and Rep Owens, Vice Chair: Rep Finger McDonald, and Members of the of the Committee

My name is Suze Wehr, and I am submitting this letter in support of **HB 2977** on behalf of the Western Environmental Law Center. Since the 1990s, we have worked every day to protect our public lands, drinking water, communities, and threatened wildlife species through the power of U.S. law and legislation. Striving toward a thriving future for Oregon and states across the west, we identify ways to ensure this future through forward-thinking policies — policies like 1% for Wildlife.

HB 2977, or 1% for Wildlife, fills a critical gap in our state’s ecological safeguards and public interest. Oregon is home to some of the most unique yet vulnerable ecosystems in America. In 2016, ODFW identified 294 species and 11 habitats needing recovery and restoration throughout the state.¹ Each of these also represents the fragile link between our natural world and the ecosystem services that sustain Oregon’s economy and the livelihoods of Oregonians. From agriculture to recreation and tourism, we depend on the health of these resources and therefore need to invest in them. As provided by the Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) 496.012, “It is the policy of the State of Oregon that wildlife shall be managed to prevent serious depletion of any indigenous species and to provide the optimum recreational and aesthetic benefits for present and future generations of the citizens of this state.”²

Species and habitat recovery requires long-term programs that need consistent, dedicated sources of funding to plan and implement programs without the risk of being cut short. General funds do not provide that stability. Additionally, funding for the Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife relies heavily on hunting/fishing sectors and federal grants — and it is inadequate. Oregonians trust their government to fund conservation and restoration efforts.³ But despite our state’s renowned environmental legacy, an astonishingly small portion of the budget contributes to the critical conservation actions identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), and our biodiversity is suffering as a result.

The Transient Lodging Tax was identified as a viable mechanism for addressing this critical biodiversity conservation need in the state for the following reasons:

¹ *Oregon Conservation Strategy: Strategy Habitats*, ODFW, <https://www.oregonconservationstrategy.org/strategy-habitats/> (last visited Feb. 24, 2023).

² **Oregon Revised Statutes § 496.012 (2023)**. General wildlife policy. https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_496.012

³ REPORT TO OREGON LEGISLATURE, *supra* note 1, at 14, 20.

- a. Healthy abundant wildlife and ecosystems are an important part of Oregon’s thriving - tourism industry. Outdoor recreation supports \$15.6 billion in total consumer spending supporting 224,000 full and part-time jobs in Oregon and \$9.3 billion in wages.⁴ Oregon’s hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching activities have accounted for \$1.2 billion in spending and have supported over 11,000 jobs in recent years.⁵ Protecting our biodiversity directly contributes back to our tourism industry.
- b. The TLT puts a significant portion of the tax burden on out-of-state visitors and not just Oregonians.⁶ This mechanism allows non-Oregonians to pay into our biodiversity recovery which draws them to Oregon in the first place.
- c. Oregon has the third lowest state Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) in the country⁷ and the increase proposed by HB 2977 only brings it up to the fourth lowest in the country.⁸ It is also a minimal increase (of 1%) which still generates a substantial revenue that is sufficient to implement our State Wildlife Action Plan, also known as the Oregon Conservation Strategy and Nearshore Strategy.

Commented [SKI]: data source in the one-pager

The problem of ODFW’s funding to meet their conservation goals is not new – this very legislature set up a task force in 2016 to try and find a solution to this problem. And the same task force also identified the TLT as a mechanism to fund it. As we keep returning to the drawing board to discover a solution, we find the same conclusion. It is time to act on it.

Witnessing a gray whale migration for the first time, spotting salamanders in a coastal wetland, catching glimpses of an owl soaring through old-growth forest — these experiences make Oregon unforgettable for residents and visitors alike. However, due to climate change, habitat loss, and myriad other human-caused impacts, these experiences are no longer guaranteed.⁹ To support the nearly 300 species at elevated risk of extinction in our state, we need rapid action and sufficient resources to apply ODFW’s strategic conservation strategies. Passing 1% for Wildlife will generate \$30 million per year for wildlife habitat and recovery,¹⁰ support our \$15 billion outdoor recreation industry, and proactively tackle the biodiversity challenges we can’t afford to ignore. Oregonians, future visitors, and our remarkable wildlife neighbors deserve this opportunity. Please demonstrate your commitment to ecological (and economic) flourishing in our state by supporting HB 2977.

Thank you for your consideration,
 Suze Wehr, Western Environmental Law Center

⁴ *Earth Economics, Economic Analysis Of Outdoor Recreation in Oregon (2019)*.

https://issuu.com/traveloregon2019/docs/economicanalysisofoutdoorrecreationinoregon_otc-ec (Page 1).

⁵ Oregon Dep’t of Fish & Wildlife, *Factsheet-Economic Impact OR Counties-Earth Economics (2019)*, <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/docs/Factsheet-Economic%20Impact%20OR%20Counties-Earth%20Economics%202019.pdf>.

⁶ Travel Oregon, *The Economic Impact of Travel* (April 2024).

<https://industry.traveloregon.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Final-report-with-updated-clackamas-and-WV-numbers.pdf> (Page 16).

⁷ Oregon Revised Statutes 320.305, “Rate and Computation of Tax” https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_320.305; Oregon Revised Statutes 320.300 “ORS 320.300 Definitions for ORS 320.300 to 320.365” https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_320.300; *2024 HVS Lodging Tax Report – USA*, HVS (Sept. 23, 2024).

<https://www.hvs.com/article/10015-2024-hvs-lodging-tax-report-usa>.

⁸ 2024 HVS Lodging Tax Report – USA, HVS (Sept. 23, 2024), <https://www.hvs.com/article/10015-2024-hvs-lodging-tax-report-usa>.

⁹ REPORT TO OREGON LEGISLATURE: HB 2402 JOINT INTERIM TASK FORCE FUNDING FOR FISH, WILDLIFE AND RELATED OUTDOOR RECREATION AND EDUCATION, at 5, available at <https://www.dfw.state.or.us/agency/budget/docs/HB%202402%20TASK%20FORCE%20-%20%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>.

¹⁰ See Oregon Department of Revenue, *Oregon’s State Lodging Tax, Program Description and Characteristics of Taxpayers: Calendar Years 2009-2018* (April 2019).

https://www.oregon.gov/dor/programs/rev-research/Documents/state-lodging-report_604-005.pdf (Table 1.2) (Page 12). Funding estimate derived from a June 2022 ODFW estimate.