

Submitter: DJ Fletcher

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2977

Date: 21 February 2025

Re: 2025 OR HB2977 "Recovering Oregon's Wildlife Fund Subaccount"

To: Members of the Oregon State House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water

Dear Legislators,

First, as a Southern Oregon voter, I thank you all for your commitment to public service.

As an outdoor enthusiast and conservation advocate, I urge you to support HB 2977, the 2025 bill to secure long-term, dedicated funding for wildlife conservation in our State.

HB 2977 would provide a steady, sustainable source of funds for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) agency to carry out Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), the strategy to direct conservation actions, and for ODFW to maintain the Oregon Conservation Strategy and Nearshore Strategy. The new funding source would enable ODFW to focus on managing species and habitats most imperiled and in need of conservation; to prevent declines of at-risk species; to reverse declines where possible; and also to enhance native plant and animal biodiversity.

There is urgent need for stable funding for ODFW's SWAP work. ODFW has identified at least 300 species of Greatest Conservation Need, 201 Species of Greatest Information Need, and 11 habitats of Conservation Concern. Stable ODFW funding is essential to preventing the further decline of Oregon's most imperiled and most vulnerable fish, wildlife, and habitats. Without funding to manage threats from natural and human-made impacts -- including invasive species, climate change, and even wildlife tourism and outdoor recreation -- their future is at risk.

As you know, HB 2977 proposes to create the new funding mechanism by increasing the state transient lodging tax (TLT) from 1.5% to 2.5%. The one-percent rise would generate approximately \$30 million a year to support wildlife conservation in Oregon. The bill would not change the existing TLT structure that gives 1.5% of tax to the Oregon Tourism Commission, but it would add an additional 1% to be directed into the "Recovering Oregon's Wildlife Fund Subaccount" within the ODFW account.

I have to tell you that I would gladly pay a TLT of "1% for Wildlife" because I benefit from living in Oregon's natural beauty. I am always excited to come across Oregon's finned, feathered, or four-footed wild critters and to discover native plants. I cannot imagine anyone who enjoys Oregon for outdoor activities objecting to paying 1% more for the privilege. My visitors, like my East Coast relatives who enjoy annual wine tourism in Oregon, would not blink an eye at paying a little more lodging tax. After all, when they want to vacation on the Jersey shore, they face a whopping 6.625% occupancy tax -- unless it is Atlantic City, where the hotel tax alone is 13.625%. I will choose the beautiful Oregon shores any day, and so will my visitors. And I am sure they would think it cool if Oregon's lodging receipts labeled the small extra charge as "1% for Recovering Oregon's Wildlife." Our tourists, no matter where they come from, are no strangers to wildlife declines, and thus they surely would agree that Oregon is setting a good example by putting some tourism dollars into wildlife conservation.

Lastly, given that it is imperative for wildlife conservation efforts to be supported, I would point out that it is much more cost-effective to provide new funding now rather than later. It costs less to prevent and manage wildlife declines and habitat degradation than to have to wait until the only course of action is to try to reverse the problem.

Please support HB 2977 to provide 1% TLT for the "Recovering Oregon's Wildlife Fund Subaccount."

Thank you.