



February 20, 2024

Dear Representatives of the House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water,

My name is Sally Compton, and I am the Executive Director of Think Wild. I am writing in strong support of House Bill 2977 – 1% for Wildlife. Oregon is known for its breathtaking landscapes, diverse habitats, and incredible wildlife—these are the very reasons people choose to live, visit, and recreate here. Hunters, anglers, birders, hikers, campers, and outdoor enthusiasts from within and outside the state all rely on and enjoy Oregon’s healthy fish, wildlife, and habitat. However, increasing pressures from population growth, development, drought, wildfires, and invasive species are putting immense strain on these vital natural resources.

House Bill 2977 is a necessary and proactive solution to these growing challenges. This bill proposes an increase in the state’s transient lodging tax from 1.5% to 2.5%, with the additional 1% dedicated entirely to a fund managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to support the conservation and recovery of Oregon’s most threatened species and habitats. The estimated \$30 million in annual funding will allow ODFW to fully implement the Oregon State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which is revised every ten years to outline critical conservation efforts. The current draft identifies at least 330 Species of Greatest Conservation Need and 201 Species of Greatest Information Need that would directly benefit from this funding.

As the Executive Director of Think Wild, a wildlife hospital and conservation organization, I see firsthand how urgently these species and habitats need support. Think Wild works on restoration projects across Central and Eastern to protect and restore imperiled wildlife, including those identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan. We serve on multiple technical committees for the SWAP, contributing expertise to ensure its effectiveness. But despite well-researched strategies and strong partnerships, conservation efforts remain drastically underfunded. Without stable funding sources like HB 2977, Oregon’s most vulnerable species will continue their decline, and the habitats they depend on will degrade beyond repair.

Some may ask whether ODFW can carry out this work with its existing resources. However, the reality is that current funding falls far short of what is required. The Oregon Wildlife Coalition has stated:

“Current funds are only a small fraction of what is required to implement critical conservation actions identified in the SWAP. For instance, state general and lottery



funds combined comprise only 10-13% of ODFW's total budget, with direct investments in the State Wildlife Action Plan at only 2.75%."

Without sufficient and stable funding from the state, Oregon's most vulnerable species and habitats will continue to decline—some potentially to the point of extinction.

Importantly, this tax increase would primarily be paid by tourists, 63% of whom come from out of state. Visitors come to Oregon for its wild landscapes, iconic species, and outdoor recreation. It is only fair that they contribute to the conservation of the very ecosystems they come to enjoy. With Oregon's statewide transient lodging tax among the lowest in the country, even with this increase, only Alaska and California would have lower rates.

According to Travel Oregon's lodging performance statistics, the average nightly room rate in Oregon is \$115, meaning this tax increase would amount to just an additional \$1.15 per night. The plan is for this charge to appear on hotel bills as "Recovering Oregon's Wildlife," making it clear that tourism dollars are directly supporting conservation.

Opponents of a similar proposal in 2023 argued that the increase would place a financial burden on Oregon's lodging industry post-COVID. However, despite these concerns, 2023 saw record-breaking travel spending in the state, totaling \$14 billion—exceeding pre-pandemic levels.

At Think Wild's hospital, we respond to thousands of calls each year from concerned citizens about injured and orphaned wildlife, as well as provide veterinary care to those in need. Many of these cases result from habitat destruction, vehicle collisions, and human-wildlife conflict—all issues that tourism increases and could be mitigated with stronger conservation funding. We also partner with landowners, land trusts, and local governments to restore critical habitat, but these efforts require reliable financial support. Oregon's wildlife and landscapes are at a tipping point, and HB 2977 presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure lasting funding for their protection.

For these reasons, I strongly support House Bill 2977 and urge its passage to ensure a sustainable future for Oregon's wildlife, natural spaces, and outdoor economy.

Sincerely,  
Sally Compton  
Executive Director, Think Wild  
Resident of Central Oregon