

Submitter: James Best
On Behalf Of: Citizens
Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3856

Testimony Against HB 3856

Dear Members of the Oregon Legislative Assembly,

I write today to strongly oppose House Bill 3856, which proposes an additional personal income tax to fund the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) while granting tax credits to those purchasing hunting and fishing permits. While conservation and wildlife management are important, this bill raises significant concerns that cannot be ignored. It appears to be yet another example of government overreach, prioritizing its own financial agenda at the expense of the very people it is meant to serve—many of whom are already struggling to make ends meet. Authority should exist to represent and serve the citizens, not to impose burdens that disregard their well-being.

1. Unfair Tax Burden on Oregon Residents

HB 3856 imposes an additional tax on all Oregon residents, regardless of whether they utilize ODFW programs or participate in outdoor recreation. This tax applies to everyone, yet only those who purchase hunting and fishing permits benefit from a tax credit. This is an inequitable distribution of tax responsibility, unfairly burdening non-hunters and non-fishers with funding a program they may never use.

2. Lack of Transparent Funding Mechanisms

Oregon's wildlife and conservation efforts should be funded in a transparent and responsible manner. This bill fails to provide clear oversight regarding how funds will be spent, beyond vague allocations to different conservation and recreational programs. While the bill mentions a reporting requirement starting in 2030, there is no immediate accountability to ensure the funds are used effectively or efficiently.

3. Potential for Financial Mismanagement

The bill introduces a new tax that will be adjusted annually for inflation, meaning the tax burden on residents could increase indefinitely. Yet, HB 3856 does not establish clear safeguards to prevent misuse or misallocation of funds. The broad distribution of tax revenues to various programs—including \$20 million to private forest mitigation and \$10 million to wolf depredation compensation—raises concerns about whether these funds will be used effectively or diverted to projects that lack direct public accountability.

4. Burden on Middle- and Lower-Income Residents

Oregon already has a high cost of living, and adding another layer of income tax—no matter how small—places an additional financial strain on working families. This tax will impact residents across all income brackets, without providing meaningful offsets for those who do not purchase hunting or fishing licenses. The tax credit only benefits those who actively engage in those activities, which means many residents will pay more without receiving any benefit.

5. Duplicative and Inefficient Approach to Wildlife Funding

ODFW already receives funding from various sources, including hunting and fishing licenses, federal grants, and state allocations. Instead of imposing a broad-based income tax, the legislature should explore alternative funding mechanisms that do not unfairly penalize residents who do not directly engage with ODFW services. A better approach would be to reassess existing budget allocations or increase permit fees for those who actively use ODFW resources, rather than forcing a tax on all Oregonians.

Conclusion

House Bill 3856 represents an unnecessary and inequitable tax increase on Oregon residents. While conservation and wildlife management are valuable, they should be funded in a way that is fair, transparent, and directly tied to those who benefit from these programs. I urge the legislature to reject HB 3856 and instead pursue funding solutions that do not impose an undue burden on taxpayers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

James Best

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