

Submitter: Timothy Babalis
On Behalf Of: HB 3143
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Dear members of the Committee,
My name is Dr. Timothy Babalis. I am testifying in support of HB 3143 "Landowners Living with Beavers." I work as an environmental historian with a federal agency. For over ten years, I have been volunteering in my spare time to support habitat restoration in eastern Oregon with the Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) and other non-profit conservation organizations. As a volunteer, I have seen first-hand how important beavers are to the health of riparian environments in our state, especially on the drier "east side." As a professional historian, I have learned through formal research about the vital role that beavers play in storing and making available more water in otherwise arid environments; in cooling the water of our rivers and streams; and in creating high quality riparian habitat that supports more wildlife and greater biodiversity. Many of these benefits seem counterintuitive. For example, how can beavers cool streamwater by building dams and creating slackwater ponds that warm in the sun? I have heard this question from skeptical landowners in eastern Oregon. The reason is that a beaver pond represents only about a tenth of the water actually retained by the beaver dam. The rest of the water—as much as ten times what you can actually see warming in the sun—is underground in the surrounding water table and quite cool. The pond water and the underground water are constantly mixing, and since there is so much more underground water, the net effect is a cooling of the streamwater that flows downstream of the beaver dam. This creates conditions that are favorable for a great many natural species, among them salmon, who need cool streamwater to flourish. Salmon have co-evolved with beaver, and without a healthy beaver population on their upstream breeding habitat, they may not survive.

The environmental benefits that beaver provide are well-established by science and well-understood by many land managers and private landowners who live in beaver habitat—or potential beaver habitat—in our state. Unfortunately, what is not well-established are the means to make it possible to support a healthy beaver population. HB 3143 is an important step toward rectifying this problem. It would provide grant money to help private landowners to implement simple solutions to protect valuable economic assets from the negative impacts of beavers—flooding of cropland and built infrastructure, depredation of orchard trees, etc.—in order to realize and benefit from the positive impacts of these "landscape engineers." As a historian who focuses on rural history, I have made many close friends over the years in the ranching and farming communities. I have come to appreciate how much these people value the land they live on and want to maintain and improve its quality. Many of these rural landowners would be happy to support beaver habitat on their

lands, but they are prevented from doing what they would like to do—what they know to be the right decision for the land— by the economics. Their profit margins are so narrow that they cannot afford even simple solutions like additional fencing, and they cannot take the risk that beaver-induced flooding might damage economically-valuable assets. HB 3143 would provide funds to support these conservation-minded landowners and make it possible for them to implement environmentally productive solutions that they themselves support but simply cannot afford. I urge you to vote for HB 3143 in order to help rural Oregonians help the environment they depend on, the environment that supports all of us in the Beaver State.