

Submitter: Austin Sumpter

Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire

Measure, Appointment or Topic: Support for House Bill 3932

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, members of the Senate Committee On Natural Resources and Wildfire,

My name is Austin Sumpter. I live in the outskirts of Canby, and I am here to provide my strong support for House Bill 3932. This bill offers an innovative means of restoring watershed health, promoting wildlife conservation, and helping build wildfire resilience all for no cost to us.

Beavers are ecosystem engineers that can reshape landscapes with their iconic dams. Besides creating habitats for countless animals, beaver dams are able to help restore water quality by lowering stream temperatures through the creation of deep pools and increased inputs of cool groundwater. Their dams and activity also serve the benefit of filtering out bodies of water, slowing down streamflow which slows down the spread of pollutants, and cutting down on the magnitude of downstream flooding. Beaver habitats also lead to the creation of wetlands, natural filters that trap excess nutrients and contaminants from mainstream bodies. Wetlands double as natural firebreaks, protecting water quality by trapping soil and ash eroding off of hillslopes. This is on top of many other benefits providing beavers these protections will offer.

I understand that this bill is not a silver bullet. As a state we must do more to restore our waterways, protect our wildlife and build up wildfire resilience. But protecting beaver activity on public watersheds can be a part of the solution. A glowing example of the improvements can be found along Bridge Creek in Wheeler County. From 1993 when grazing around the creek was reduced and beaver trapping was curtailed, ecosystem engineering from beavers led to the restoration of riparian vegetation along the stream and floodbanks, slowed streamflow, and greater stability for the watershed by 2009. By 2017, beaver activity resulted in extensive plant communities, more water getting spread out, slower sediment deposition, and a higher water table.

Let's remember that Oregon is nicknamed the Beaver State. It's on the reverse side of our state flag, and it's been our state animal

(mammal, specifically) since 1969. After mankind had spent much of the 19th century trapping them for their fur and almost wiping them out, much of our watersheds have become impaired for decades. One of the best ways we can make up for this and improve our watersheds is by respecting these rodents and their natural habits and letting them reshape the landscape to a more natural, efficacious state. Let's embrace these ecosystem engineers as a valuable part of improving Oregon's resilience to wildfires and improving our state's conservation work by passing House Bill 3932 out of Committee and through the Oregon State Senate. I ask that you'll give this bill your support and help Oregon deliver on these long overdue changes.