

May 5, 2025

Honored Members of the Oregon House of Representatives,

And Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

Regarding HB 2977, a bill to increase the Oregon state lodging tax that would address the funding for fish, wildlife, and habitat restoration, our Klamath Basin Audubon Society urges that this bill passes. Funding for this effort to improve habitat and imperiled animals is desperately needed. Maintaining healthy habitats is necessary to keep tourists coming to Oregon, for its wildlife and its natural beauty. Tourism benefits directly from the multitude of visitors that come to this state each month and yearly to experience this great state's natural wonders. Oregon must maintain the very resource that attracts visitors. In turn, the lodging industry will have a direct connection to the funding that protects future tourism. The HB 2977 is supported by Klamath Basin Audubon Society and urges that it passes.

Around the state Oregon, tourism is an important component for many communities. Klamath Falls is an excellent example of how tourism works for this community. Visitors are especially attracted to locations such as Crater Lake National Park, Lava Beds National Monument, Lower Klamath National Wildlife Refuge, Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Winema Fremont National Forest, Oregon State Wildlife Area- Miller Island Management Unit, and Bureau of Land Management at Wood River Wetland. These areas have a long tradition of having exceptional wildlife. These locations are well known across the nation, and families make plans to come to this area to have experiences that have valuable life-long memories. A great example of this wildlife attraction here in the Klamath Basin was the Winter Wings Festival. This festival was one of the largest and longest running festivals in the lower 48 states. Visitors came each year to experience the wintering Bald Eagles that sometimes reached 600-800. This festival was well known across the country and attracted upwards of 350 to over 500 attendees on some years. The community benefited during this festival with visitors lodging at motels and hotels in the Klamath Basin. It is well known that the Klamath Basin has constant visitors to the refuges where over 250 species of birds can be seen at times throughout each year. Crater Lake and Lava Beds both attract visitors interested in panoramic views, but also to see the wildlife that is present. In recent years, the Winter Wings Festival was forced to stop. There was a change in the local natural resources. The local lodging industry had a drop in revenue after Winter Wings Festival stopped. There are other missed opportunities, and it is most notable during years with below average precipitation. There are fewer visits during lean water years. The local refuges lack wildlife during those low water years. The point here is that the Klamath Basin is an attractive destination. The tourism component is a key source of income for the community of Klamath Falls. Supporting the wildlife and habitats that the wildlife in turn depends upon is vital for Klamath Falls, and it is important that it continue. The board of Klamath Basin Audubon Society urges that you pass HB 2977. The Klamath Basin is well known for wildlife and habitats all year round. This HB 2977 will ensure that Oregon's habitats and wildlife are managed well into the future, which in turn contributes and gives back to a thriving tourism industry.

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