

Submitter:

Russ Mead

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Revenue

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB2977

Testify in favor of Oregon 2025 HB 2977.

Russ Mead, Animal Law Professor, Seaside Oregon

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to express my support for House Bill 2977. This "1% for Wildlife" bill increases the state's transient lodging tax from 1.5% to 2.5%. The tax provides dedicated funding for Oregon's wildlife conservation efforts. This legislation represents a critical step toward securing the future of Oregon's diverse species and habitats.

I live in Seaside, Oregon, a tourist destination. Tourists come to the wilds of Oregon largely because we have preserved our natural beauty and wildlife. I see elk, eagles, and shorebirds every week. During nesting season, I see puffins. We need to protect our wildlife to protect our tourist economy. This tax helps keep the tourist dollars flowing. It is tourism positive.

I am an animal law professor and have been General Counsel for major animal protection organizations. I have witnessed firsthand the challenges when conservation initiatives lack consistent funding mechanisms. The approach proposed in HB 2977 addresses this fundamental issue. HB2977 creates a sustainable revenue stream for implementing Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan.

Oregon currently has nearly 300 species at elevated risk of extinction and 11 habitats of conservation concern. This is real. By directing a modest increase in the lodging tax toward wildlife conservation, this legislation ensures that tourists who enjoy Oregon's natural beauty contribute directly to its preservation.

More importantly, it allows us to take more action to protect these species. The animals are in jeopardy because of us, and we have a duty to them. This was their home long before it became our home.

This approach is both fair and practical. The financial burden of funding ODFW has fallen disproportionately on hunters and anglers through license and tag fees for years. While these sportsmen and women have consistently stepped up as conservation leaders, Oregon's wildlife belongs to all residents. Oregon benefits from the state's \$8 billion ecotourism industry. (Some say over \$10 billion!) It is reasonable to ask visitors who temporarily enjoy our natural resources to contribute to their long-term protection.

I have dedicated my professional life to animal advocacy through legal practice, education, and the arts. Seldom do I see a new law as important as HB2977. It provides proactive funding for conservation, representing a more humane and effective approach than crisis management.

I urge you to support HB 2977 and ensure its passage. This legislation represents a practical, forward-thinking approach to wildlife conservation. It aligns with our ethical

obligations to protect vulnerable species and our economic interests in maintaining Oregon's natural heritage.