



May 7, 2025

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2977 – Increasing the Transient Lodging Tax to Support Wildlife Conservation

Dear Chair Nathanson, Vice-Chairs Reschke and Walters, and Members of the House Committee on Revenue,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of HB 2977**, which proposes increasing Oregon's state-level transient lodging tax (TLT) from 1.5% to 2.5%, and dedicating the new revenue to conserving and recovering Oregon's imperiled wildlife and their habitats. This is simple, proactive, and common sense policy and the revenue increase is justified and needed for a variety of reasons:

Visitors flock to Oregon from across the country and around the globe, often visiting specifically because of our iconic landscapes and unique wildlife. They come to **whale watch along the coast, go birding at our national wildlife refuges, raft our rivers, and hike in our old-growth forests**. HB 2977 will provide a necessary safeguard to sustain these natural resources by ensuring these visitors help contribute to the conservation of the very habitats and species that bring them here.

Oregon is repeatedly struggling to pay for agencies to manage and protect our natural resources, yet the need to do so is becoming even more dire with a global extinction crisis knocking on our door. Presently, the **Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)** has identified **nearly 300 species at elevated risk of extinction** and **11 habitats of conservation concern**. These include native birds, fish, pollinators, and mammals that are all vital to our ecosystems—and to the experiences that draw visitors and outdoor enthusiasts to our state. These species are critical to the long term survival of our natural world, but also our economies reliant on tourism and natural resource use.

Unfortunately, **ODFW's existing state funding is consistently inadequate** to address these growing risks. Without sustained, reliable funding, the agency is often **unable to fully implement Oregon's State Wildlife Action Plan**, our blueprint for proactively conserving wildlife before it reaches the point of crisis. It is **far more cost-effective to address threats early**, before species are on the brink of extinction and recovery becomes much more difficult and expensive. This bill is a proactive strategy to provide long-term revenue to support resource management.

This modest 1% increase would generate meaningful, long-term resources to fill that gap—while still keeping Oregon's lodging tax **among the lowest in the nation**. It's a common-sense, high-impact investment that both protects our natural legacy and sustains the tourism economy it underpins.

I urge your support for HB 2977 and this strategic effort to fund wildlife and habitat conservation in a way that aligns with Oregon's identity and values.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,

Annie Merrill
Marine Conservation Manager
Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition

In Oregon, the beaches belong to the people.

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