

Submitter:

Mary Pantenburg

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Rules

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB2977

Dear senator,

Last week, I was on a run along the Deschutes River Trail when I nearly broke my ankle trying to stop—so fast I almost tripped. Why did I stop? I saw a beaver! It was right next to the trail, munching on some twigs.

In my 29 years of living in Bend, I had never seen a beaver in the wild. And yet, this animal is not only Oregon's state mascot, but a keystone species! I couldn't help myself—I stopped and stared, took photos, and even began stopping other people on the trail to show them. Everyone had the same reaction: wonder and excitement. Tourists were thrilled. Older folks exclaimed, "Wow, I didn't know we still had these around!"

Wildlife in Oregon connects us to this place we call home. Beavers, in particular, have worked so hard—on their own and with human help—to recover from the fur trade of the 1800s. But now they're facing a new threat: continued habitat loss.

HB 2977 proposes a small fee on tourists—people who come to enjoy our landscapes and leave with lifelong memories. Isn't that a fair exchange, if it helps protect the wildlife that makes Oregon so special?

Will tourists still come if we no longer have the eye-catching osprey soaring over Miller's Landing Park, or the iconic beavers of the Deschutes? What will draw people to Bend if the animals that make this place feel alive no longer live here?

As for my beaver sighting—I eventually said farewell, the beaver swam away, and the crowd continued along the trail, buzzing with excitement.

Wildlife is central to Central Oregon's culture and way of life—not to mention the many ecological benefits that beavers bring, from habitat restoration to water conservation. But I'll leave it to someone smarter than me to explain their global impact.

All I want you to know is this: part of what I love most about Oregon is that I can go for a run along the river and see wildlife around every corner.