



June 7, 2011

Dear Members of the House Revenue Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Audubon Society of Portland and our 11,000 members in the Portland Metropolitan Area in strong support of House Bill 3374, the Wild Bird Conservation Act. This legislation is also supported by several other Audubon Chapters across Oregon including Salem Audubon, Lane County Audubon, Kalmiopsis Audubon, Klamath Basin Audubon, and Lincoln City Audubon. We urge your support for this important legislation which will for the first time provide a stable revenue source targeted towards the conservation of Oregon's wild birds.

HB 3374 would add a five cent charge per pound to the sale of wild bird seed, literally a "nickel for the birds." It would generate nearly \$2 million/ year which could increase to nearly \$4 million with federal match and other matching opportunities. The funds would be spent on wild bird conservation and education projects across Oregon on both rural and urban landscapes, driven by the Oregon Conservation Strategy---a blueprint for conservation recognized as one of the best statewide conservation plans in the country. As an organization with 11,000 members who would be paying this tax, we are extremely sensitive to ensuring that this funding will be well used and after nearly two years of working on this legislation, we are convinced that the conservation strategy based approach, oversight committee, sunset clause, and collaboration with the agency to date are sufficient to ensure that that this will be a well used and very much needed investment in Oregon's natural heritage.

HB 3374 is needed to protect and restore Oregon's' wild bird populations: Many of Oregon's bird species are experiencing significant long-term populations declines. Recent reports by the National Audubon Society, American Bird Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service demonstrate that nearly one out of every four bird species in Oregon has experienced significant population declines over the past 40 years. Some species such as the snowy plover, northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet are already listed under the Endangered Species Act. Others such as the streaked horned lark and sage grouse are currently proposed for listing. Our state bird, the western meadowlark has disappeared throughout much of its historic range. Even backyard favorites like the rufous hummingbird and evening grosbeak, while still common today, have already lost more than 50% of their population and will grow increasingly rare in the future if current trends continue. The Oregon Conservation Strategy has been recognized as one of the best plans in the nation for restoring imperiled habitats and imperiled species, but we need a stable source of funding to allow the plan to be implemented. It is critical that we invest now before additional species become listed rather than wait to have to implement far more costly and disruptive programs after species become listed.

HB 3374 is strongly supported by birders. Over the past two years we have repeatedly gone to our membership and the birding community for feedback on this legislation and have found them overwhelmingly supportive of its passage. Birders want a mechanism to directly support the species that they enjoy. Unlike other recently proposed taxes, the Wild Bird Conservation Act is not a situation when one group is trying to tax another. Rather it is a situation where birders are stepping up and saying "we want to contribute ourselves!"

HB 3374 is supported by bird feeding shops: Audubon has worked directly with the Backyard Bird Shops, Oregon's largest independent chain of bird feeding stores to develop HB 3374. In addition, Portland Audubon runs its own nature store and relies heavily on revenue from the sale of bird seed in order to fund our sanctuary, conservation and environmental education programs. We will be directly affected by

Audubon Society of Portland
5151 NW Cornell Road
Portland, Oregon 97210

the impact of this legislation. However we believe strongly that our customers will be willing to pay an extra five cents for the birds and in general will view this a consistent with their commitment to bird conservation.

HB 3374 is a good investment in our economy: Birding brings money into Oregon. It is the fastest growing pastime in the United States. Each year 1.7 wildlife watchers bring more spend more than \$1 billion in Oregon--many of those out of state dollars. Our birding trails and wildlife refuges spur local economies with tourism dollars in some of the most economically challenges portions of our state. This grant would continue to promote Oregon as a national birding hotspot. It would also create green restoration jobs. fially it would bring additional revenue into the state through federal matching programs.

HB 3374 is a matter of fairness: Hunters and fishermen have been paying a tax on their recreational equipment which is used to promote game and fish species for nearly a century. As a result those wildlife populations have a stable source of funding and many of those populations have flourished. It is important that everybody who enjoys wildlife step up to help fund preservation of our natural heritage. At a time of shrinking general fund revenue, it is critical that we seek new, stable, creative sources for funding programs like the non-game program at ODFW.

HB 3374 will engage a new generation in conservation: HB 3374 will include a mix of restoration and education projects across our rural and urban landscapes. Part of the focus of HB 3374 is to reach out to new audiences, including historically underserved audiences to get them engaged in conservation in a proactive, constructive manner. One of the cool things about birds is that there is a way for people to become engaged in conservation from the most urban backyard to our rural communities to our wildest landscapes.

We urge you to vote in support of HB 3374 and move it forward in this session. It was conceived of by the bird feeding industry (Backyard Bird Shops) and is supported by the broad conservation community, other natural resource interests and most importantly by the public which would be paying a "nickel for the birds." It is good for the environment, our economy and our communities. Some may ask how we can do something like this in a down economy; the answer that these are exactly the times when we can least afford not to take advantage of these types of opportunities.

Thank your for your consideration of HB 3374



Bob Sallinger
Conservation Director

Audubon Society of Portland
5151 NW Cornell Road
Portland, Oregon 97210