



March 22, 2019

Sen. Reuven Carlyle
233 John A. Cherberg Building
PO Box 40436
Olympia, WA 98504
Reuven.Carlyle@leg.wa.gov

RE: Support HB 1578 to Improve Safety of Oil Transportation and Reduce Risks to Wildlife

Dear Senator Carlyle,

Greetings from Seattle Audubon, Washington State's oldest conservation organization. We've been leading a local community in appreciating, understanding, and protecting birds since 1916. Today, our membership includes over 4,000 individuals from Seattle, Shoreline, Mercer Island, Des Moines, Redmond, Kenmore, Tukwila, and other King County cities, making us one of the largest and most active Audubon chapters in the U.S. Our service area includes Washington Legislative District 36 and we write to you today as constituents urging you to improve the safety of oil transportation and reduce risks to wildlife by supporting HB 1578.

As you know, Puget Sound provides important habitat for many iconic Pacific Northwest species. Orca and salmon are among the most well-known, but the Sound supports huge numbers of birds, too. Each year, tens of thousands of seabirds, waterfowl, and shorebirds visit our region to breed, refuel on their way to breeding grounds elsewhere, and survive the winter. Seabirds and shorebirds are extremely vulnerable to coastal oil spills. For example, the Exxon Valdez spill is estimated to have killed 250,000 seabirds; nearly 70 times more than the combined number of orcas, bald eagles, harbor seals, and sea otters that died as a result of the spill. There has been a steady rise in oil tanker traffic globally, and with the approval of the Trans Mountain Pipeline in British Columbia, we can expect significant increases of tanker traffic in our shared Salish Sea. As the specter of catastrophic oil spill looms ever larger, the prognosis for seabirds could be bleak. They are already one of the most threatened groups of birds in the world. We've seen global numbers of seabirds decline by 70% over the past 50 years and today, a larger percentage of seabirds are listed as threatened or endangered than any comparable group of birds. This is exemplified in Washington State too: of the 37 bird species listed as Endangered, Threatened, Sensitive, or Candidate, 10 are seabirds (27%, a higher percentage than any other group of bird). Populations of marbled murrelet have declined in our state by 44% since 2001, and common murre are down to about one-third their former level. Oil spills could further devastate these birds whose populations are already in decline.

Seattle Audubon is preparing for the eventuality of an oil spill. We manage the Puget Sound Seabird Survey, a community science program that mobilizes hundreds of Seattle Audubon volunteers to monitor seabirds using the nearshore waters of the southern Salish Sea. As part of

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SEATTLE AUDUBON
FOR BIRDS AND NATURE



this work, we've expanded volunteer training for early on-scene reconnaissance in the event of an oil spill. We have developed a geographically distributed and coordinated network of observers who are trained in recording the presence of oil and species at risk of being oiled so they can report their observations quickly to responsible agencies. We hope we never have occasion to test their training.

HB 1578 can help. The law would modernize safety regulations for oil traffic in Puget Sound and reduce the risk of catastrophic oil spills. This is the minimum needed for wildlife and for the millions of Washington residents and visitors who depend on the health and quality of Puget Sound waters.

On behalf of over 4,000 Seattle Audubon members, we urge you to pass HB 1578 to reduce the threat of catastrophic oil spills in Puget Sound.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Toby Ross".

Toby Ross
Senior Science Manager
Seattle Audubon

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joshua Morris".

Joshua Morris
Urban Conservation Manger
Seattle Audubon

CC: Joshua Peck; Joshua.Peck@leg.wa.gov