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Bill seeks to end mink farming in Oregon

By Sydney Dauphinais (Jefferson Public Radio)

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Oregon's mink industry is small, but some see it as a threat in the fight against COVID-19. In response, a new bill in the Oregon Legislature seeks to end all mink farming in the state.

If passed, all 11 mink farms in Oregon would close by the end of the year. COVID-19 can spread between humans and minks, and there have been reported mutations of the virus among mink populations.

Lori Ann Burd is with the Center for Biological Diversity. She says this ban would be crucial in protecting public health.

"What we've learned is that mink are just so uniquely susceptible to respiratory viruses that this is a very real risk," says Burd. "And we've had over 10,000 mink in the United States already die of COVID-19 and many more abroad."

Burd says mink are known to escape from farming facilities, increasing the risk of spread to wildlife and humans.

The proposed bill includes programs for mink farmers to transition to another career, providing priority status for Oregon workforce programs and access to small business loans.

If passed, Oregon would be the first state in the country to ban mink farming.