



March 27, 2019

The Honorable Michael Dembrow
Chair
Senate Environment & Natural Resources Committee
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

The Honorable Alan Olsen
Vice Chair
Senate Environment & Natural Resources Committee
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chairman Dembrow, Vice Chair Olsen and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the more than 17,000 Oregon members of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), we would like to express our concerns about Senate Bills 301, 303 and 398—related to landowner damage tags to take elk.

SB 301 requires the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to issue limitless elk damage tags to landowners and other citizens for areas where elk are causing damage, have historically caused damage or in areas where ODFW seeks to reduce elk populations. This bill represents a rather heavy-handed approach to elk management and depredation. ODFW already has several options to address elk damage on private lands, including the Open Fields Program, damage control hunts and the Landowner Preference Program. These programs are appropriately managed by ODFW according to elk population objectives established by biologists with input from landowners. First, the bill offers no statutory definition or standard for what constitutes damage. Second, issuing limitless elk damage tags to landowners or their renters could potentially reduce elk numbers below objective in one or more hunting district. And third, the bill usurps ODFW responsibility and authority to manage elk and other wildlife to benefit present and future generations.

SB 303 includes provisions similar to SB 301, but limits landowner damage tags to one antlerless elk per person. However, it would also allow the damage tag to be used on neighboring property with written permission. While SB 303 has more reasonable limits on authorization of damage tags than SB 301, it still fails to provide an objective standard for damage and also appropriates ODFW elk management responsibilities.

SB 398 is perhaps the most objectionable of the three bills heard before the committee. This bill would allow elk depredation tag holders to take an elk of any sex or age over two hunting seasons and also sell tags to the highest bidder. This is simply commercialization of public wildlife which flies in the face of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model and would drastically impact ODFW's ability to manage elk herds according to biological objectives for age structure and reproductive rates. The other problem with this bill is eligibility for a depredation tag is determined by presence of 50 elk on a particular property on 30 or more days in a year. The bill does not distinguish between a parcel of 5 acres or 5,000 acres. Fifty elk on a five-acre plot would certainly do some damage, but 50 animals spread out on a 5,000 acre property would most likely not.



The intent of these three bills is clear: rapid reduction of Oregon's elk herds through authorization and commercialization of special tags for landowners. RMEF understands the frustration of many landowners who experience real damage from elk to their crops, equipment and livelihoods. Yet these bills are the wrong way to address such problems. Instead, RMEF supports ODFW's existing landowner incentive programs to utilize public hunters to help achieve elk population objectives.

These bills treat the symptoms of elk herd distribution rather than its true causes—lack of suitable habitat on adjacent public lands and pressure from predators. The Oregon State Senate would do well to address these problems before considering statutory landowner damage tag bills.

Please table Senate Bills 301, 303 and 398.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Blake L. Henning
RMEF Chief Conservation Officer