



March 27, 2019

The Honorable Brad Witt
Chair

Committee on Natural Resources
Oregon House of Representatives
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

The Honorable Chris Gorsek
Vice Chair

Committee on Natural Resources
Oregon House of Representatives
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

The Honorable Sherrie Sprenger
Vice Chair

Committee on Natural Resources
Oregon House of Representatives
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chairman Witt, Vice Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger 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 House Bill 3227—establishing an excessive elk damage pilot program.

This bill represents a rather heavy-handed approach to elk management and depredation. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (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, this bill offers no statutory definition or standard for what constitutes “excessive elk damage.” Second, issuing limitless elk damage tags to landowners, their renters, business partners, shareholders and anyone they decide to give or sell them to could potentially reduce elk numbers below objective in one or more hunting unit boundary within the counties identified in the legislation. Third, the bill usurps ODFW responsibility and authority to provide for the benefit of wildlife resources and balance social, economic and recreational interests—as directed by the state’s Wildlife Policy (2017 ORS 496.012). Fourth, this bill does not establish minimum acreage for properties included in the elk damage program. Tag holders with one-acre parcels would be provided the same opportunity as those with 5,000-acre properties to kill as many cow elk as they wanted. Fifth, HB 3227 would allow tag holders to use artificial light to take elk. This is a direct violation of the rules of fair chase and would embolden anti-hunters.

This bill would simply commercialize public wildlife, which would violate the North American Wildlife Conservation Model, and drastically impact the ability of ODFW to manage elk herds according to biological objectives for age structure and reproductive rates.

The intent of this bill 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 this bill is 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.



This bill treats 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 House of Representatives would do well to address these problems before considering this statutory landowner damage pilot program.

Please table HB 3227.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Blake L. Henning
RMEF Chief Conservation Officer