



OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

WILDLIFE • HABITAT • HUNTERS' RIGHTS

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Testimony on HB 3227
Paul Donheffner, Legislative Committee Chair

OHA, with 10,000 members statewide, appreciates the fact that elk damage to farmers and ranchers is a very real issue across many parts of our state. Elk are also very near and dear to Oregon's 264,000 hunters, who pay over \$26 million in license fees, and \$17 million in PR funds to support hunting and wildlife conservation. Simply put, elk are a very big deal for us.

HB 3227 has a variety of problems that ODFW and others will spell out. In brief, we are opposed to the commercialization of elk, and making damage tags a commodity. This is simply unacceptable. In our opinion, this bill has too many issues to fix, and not enough time.

However, we realize there is legitimate damage caused by elk. There is currently a damage tag program, which will sunset in January 2020 unless action is taken by this Legislature. 2019 is the programs last year. The House has already passed HB-2067 to repeal the sunset.

Over the past few years we have participated in numerous meetings with ODFW, ranchers, farmers, hunters and other stakeholders trying to address elk damage. It was a very frustrating process to say the least. OHA wants hunters to be a part of the solution where too many elk concentrate on private lands.

We recommended a revitalized use of existing tools such as "emergency hunts" where persons with a "MASTER HUNTER" certificate could help. Much to our dismay, ODFW cancelled the MASTER HUNTER program. We had a solution, they threw the whole program into the trash. We are very frustrated. Elk are a public resource. We, the public, want to help in managing them. Let's find a solution that involves hunters and landowners and ODFW.

So, where do we go? HB 3227 creates a vastly expanded damage program, opening the door to potential abuses, and OHA cannot support it. The current program, while it may have some problems, is working. We would like to recommend that an interim Legislative Task Force or work group be established to come up with better solutions and get buy in from all the stakeholders prior to 2021.

In the meantime, we support removing the sunset on the existing program. We want to make a good faith effort at finding a solution that works for landowners, hunters, and elk.

This is a very important issue for all of the stakeholders. Let's take the time to get it right.