

To Representative Greg Barreto

I am writing to ask for your help in dealing with the ongoing problem of elk on the valley floor. This has become a perennial issue that the agriculture producers in Union county are dealing with again this winter. I have spoken with local representatives for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife throughout the winter to express my concern and frustration with this issue. Additionally I have had a conversation with Grande Ronde Watershed Manager Jeff Yanke and I have spoken with one member of the Union County Sheriff's Department and I intend on contacting Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen about this issue in the near future. I have been asked by everyone that I have spoken to what I think we should do about the issue. I do not know and I don't believe it is my job to come up with a solution.

I began expressing my concern with the number of elk that are currently spending the winter exclusively on private property last spring with the local staff of Fish and Wildlife. I let my concerns be known again shortly after Christmas when the elk began to move away from the foothills and towards the center of the valley where they come together in ever larger herds that can number between 500 and 600. When a herd this size began to move onto my ground I contacted the Fish and Wildlife with my concerns and anger over the damage that this number of animals can cause particularly if they are on your ground when it is not frozen. I feel that the local staff has made some effort to mitigate the issue with depredation tags early in the winter and hazing permits all winter long. In the last several weeks they have been responsive to my requests about elk on my property coordinating with other producers to move the large herd to areas where they do less damage. Unfortunately their concern and efforts have done little to address the issue. The last couple of times they have moved the elk they return within three days. While I appreciate the efforts of the local Fish and Wildlife employees these efforts are temporary and do little to change the fact that the elk do not belong on private property for three to four months of the year.

Although I have had elk on all of the ground I farm this winter my biggest complaint is when they move onto my farm that is three miles east of La Grande. This farm is a long ways from public ground of any substantial size and historically has not had elk in the winter. Six or Seven years ago we had a small herd of elk numbering in the mid-20's move thru the farm and I went and got the landowner who was in his mid-80's to look at them, he commented that he had never seen elk on this farm in his fifty years operating it. I am not sure why the elk have moved into the south valley in such numbers but they do not belong here. I find it unconscionable that the public of the state of Oregon would expect such a small group of individuals to unfairly carry the burden of feeding and housing a resource that unarguably belongs to everyone. Allowing the elk to continue to winter on private ground is no different than having a local government official use the credit card of a private individual to fuel a government vehicle while claiming that the vehicle belongs to the people of the state of Oregon.

I appreciate your time and am hopeful that when properly motivated the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife can come up with a solution that does not require private landowners to care for the animals that clearly belong to everyone in the state.

Sincerely,

John Frisch
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