



TESTIMONY

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

March 28, 2019

Natural Resource Coalition Support for HB 3227

Chair Witt and Members of the Committee:

Our organizations support HB 3227. Together with our groups represent Oregon's farmers, ranchers, timber, small woodlands, and natural resources managers. With nearly 45 million acres in natural resource use in Oregon, private lands provide significant fish and wildlife habitat relied upon by hunters and recreationalists alike. The management of lands and wildlife are critical to Oregon's economy and ecosystems. Over the past years, Oregon's Roosevelt and Rocky Mountain elk populations have grown past the capacity of public lands and are increasingly spreading onto private lands causing significant damage to crop and range lands.

We are supportive of efforts to improve elk management. HB 3227 aim to establish a pilot program for Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to manage the increasing elk populations across Oregon. Landowners across the state are losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost crop value, fence damage, livestock feed, and time in hazing elk off private property. Our members are supportive of ODFW programs that allow landowners to harvest elk in efforts to manage populations and protect valuable crop and rangelands.

ODFW operates the Oregon Landowner Damage Program (OLDP) which was first established in 1996 as part of the Landowner Preference Program (LOP). The LOP was decoupled and modified as a new section of ORS 496.146 (Section 9) in 2013. OLDP serves Oregon landowners who are experiencing damage to their private property from elk. We believe that HB 3227 before you today would complement and supplement the OLDP to address increasing elk populations in the state.

HB 3227 contains two parts that would be beneficial to elk management. First, an "Excessive Elk Damage Pilot Program" would be established. The pilot program would allow property owners or managers within seven counties: Lincoln, Tillamook, Clatsop, Union, Morrow, Wallowa, and Umatilla, to register for a special elk tag. These tags would permit the taking of an antlerless elk on the property registered by the person. The program sets no limits on the number of tags total or per person and allows the flexibility for the tag to use by other persons on the registered property.

Second, HB 3227 would require ODFW to report back to the legislature by September 2020. The report would look at the population of each area, management objectives, summarize the damage, and effectiveness of the pilot program. This bill would provide insight into the elk population in each region and provide a check on the pilot program to ensure management objectives are being maintained.

HB 3227 would provide a pilot program from ODFW to target areas with known severe elk populations. Collectively we have heard from members across the state that the local ODFW biologists have inconsistently administered LOP tags. ODFW has within their existing authorities the ability to increase harvest levels, modify regulations on current hunting tags, and haze elk of private lands and back onto public lands. Adding a quality assurance check on population survey estimates to ensure accurate counts, as many of our members report higher numbers on their lands. Lands, crops, and infrastructure damage is significant and an economic suppressant on Oregon's natural resource economy.

We support ODFW's mission to balance wildlife on public lands holistically. The current elk management programs have been well used by landowners across the state but are not enough. Elk on private lands is not easily accessible to both apex and human predators. Providing additional tools and resources for landowners will help apply pressure on elk herds to push them back onto public lands.

Thank you for your time and consideration of elk population management and HB 3227. For more information, please contact Jonathan Sandau at sandau@oregonfb.org.