

Chair and Committee Members, Senate Natural Resources & Wildfire Recovery Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB 21.

I am Frances Preston I live in Prairie City, Oregon in Grant County.

I know the area as Murder's Creek which is how I will reference it throughout my testimony
"Murder's Creek Something for Everyone"!

Murderer's Creek received its name when in 1862 three prospectors were killed when Paiute
Indians did the sleeping men in by throwing rocks on them from atop a cliff.

In 1929 the Oregon State Legislature established the Murderer's Creek Game Refuge.

In 1935 the Forest Service reduced the time livestock could be on the forest.

In 1938 the Commission authorized deer tags.

In 1945 it was stated Grant County ranges originally provided perhaps the most productive
mule deer (46,000) habitat in the state. With the cooperation of Grant County citizens and
federal, state, and county resource agencies; Murderer's Creek ranges can be restored and
again become the most productive mule deer habitat in the state.

In the 1960's Murderer's Creek Ranch offered a variety of recreational opportunities. Rapidly
increasing hunting and fishing demands justified acquiring these lands for the benefit of future
generations. In it's largest acquisition ever, the Oregon Game Commission in the fall of 1972
made the purchase.

In July of 1997 there is "Murderer's Creek Wildlife Area Land Exchange" between the Oregon
Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation in Grant County.

In 2014, and 2015 approximately 220,000 acres burned in Grant County. Causing the ventenata
to propagate with a vengeance. It has taken over every bare spot the fire left eventually taking
over the entire plant communities even in the unburned areas with marginal soils.

In 2017 the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODF&W) was gathering baseline data for
migratory fish habitat. When ask where their study site was they indicated the South Fork of
Deer Creek. This is an area when in the mid 1900's, 16 armored check dams were installed to
mitigate past damage to stream dynamics and the water table caused by historic beaver
trapping. The uppermost check dam diverted water out of the creek into an irrigation ditch.
These check dams have prevented migratory fish access to the waters above the mouth of the
South Fork Deer Creek. When ask how these check dams could be overlooked and not noted in
the study as the main effect on stream dynamics no answer was given.

In 1982 log weirs are armored into the banks and are the biggest detriment to the fish survival. Again, the biggest obstacle to migratory fish habitat was not addressed in the baseline data. The data EXCLUDES information NECESSARY to make an INFORMED CONCLUSION that grazing and timber harvest are RESPONSIBLE for the downward trend of migratory fish in the Southfork Watershed.

The extensive damage to critical habitat streams became more prevalent when ODF&W decided to issue a disproportional amount of tags compared to the amount of game available.

The environment that ONCE supported the biggest deer herd in Oregon is gone, along with every other species that thrived in this ecosystem. Remember in 1972, when the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife purchase this land, it was PROMISED that they would improve the winter habitat for the deer. It is a COMPLETE and utter FAILURE.

The Murderer's Creek Wildlife Area is no longer environmentally viable for anything in the ecosystem due to the complete destruction of the uplands. The culprits behind the WORST environmental DISASTER in Oregon's history are an exotic invasive species named ventenata and another invasive, medusa head rye. Both ventenata and medusa are silica based, which means nothing CAN EAT IT. Ventenata originated in North Africa and has NO natural enemies in the United States. It affects EVERY animal in the food chain, including fish. Birds cannot even eat the seeds. Fire stimulates the growth.

2018 Citizens of Grant County figured out the seriousness of this environmental situation, invited experts from Oregon State University for an on-the-ground inspection. This was the BEST move anyone could have made. This team was extremely professional and willing to tackle the DAUNTING TASK of trying to get this invasive species under control before it consumed ALL the perennial grasses. Startup funding were requested. The scientists needed a couple of two-acre plots to start their research. A tentative date to start the project was set for JUNE 2020.

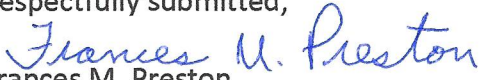
Three weeks prior to approval, a SHOCKING turn of events occurred. The Izee Watershed Council, who had taken over the project, was informed that funds for the startup were not available and, worse yet, the scientists from OSU would not be allowed access to the land for study.

In closing I hope that by providing some history and a reflection of actual on-the-ground events over the years I have painted a picture for you as to what HAPPENED when the environmental SAFEGARDS were taken away in this designation. When the safeguards are removed THEY can NO LONGER address an environmental altering DISASTER, such as the ventenata invasion. The seed source for the invasives are there and the alleged reasons for this designation ARE NO LONGER VALID. Sage-grouse gone, birds of prey gone, wildlife gone, all perennial grasses gone.

Chair and Committee Members, I pray that you will move Senate Bill 21 forward and provide the future support needed for ODF&W to do what is now critically necessary to meet the goal

to improve habitat, site resistance, and resilience by simultaneously restoring below and above ground site conditions through removal of invasive species, replacement with native perennial bunchgrasses, and amendment with organic matter and native soil microbial communities; with the overall objective being to do what can be done to renew the “promise made in 1972 by the Oregon Game Commission to the citizens of Grant County for the benefit of wildlife”; and fish too..... time is running out. This concludes my testimony. Thank you. Do you have questions?

Respectfully submitted,


Frances M. Preston
P.O. Box 3, 121 South Washington Street
Prairie City, Oregon 97869
541-820-4463
fmpreston1@gmail.com

If they don't have questions of me may I ask three questions of the Committee

- What priority so far do they place on SB21?
- If accepted as a Bill how soon will work begin?
- Because this is a Critical on going Disaster and the Research is a year behind is there anyway the research can be approved right away and started?