



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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To: **The Honorable Jeff Golden, Chair**
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery



Senate Bill 21
Kevin Blakely, Wildlife Division Deputy Administrator
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Department appreciates the opportunity to discuss Senate Bill 21, and has no position on the bill. Senate Bill 21 would require the Department to develop and adopt by rule an invasive grass pilot program on the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area (PWSWA) in order to increase habitat quality and quantity for mule deer and livestock. The PWSWA was acquired in 1972 to protect and enhance winter habitat for mule deer populations in the upper John Day River, and Aldrich and east Ochoco Mountains. The wildlife area serves to protect, enhance and restore wildlife habitats and provide public access to thousands of acres of public land.

Summary information on previous and ongoing [Murderers Creek Basin Restoration](#) efforts was completed as part of an advanced degree through Oregon State University (OSU) in 2016. Restoration efforts include landscape scale treatments (juniper reduction, invasive grass control, perennial re-vegetation) and monitoring of vegetative changes and mule deer response. The restoration efforts align with the long-range management plan for PWSWA and implementation of Department's Mule Deer Initiative. Habitat work and research is primarily funded with Department license/tag revenue and federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds. Key partnerships include OSU, Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA National Resource Conservation Service, BLM, local watershed council, and Oregon Hunters Association.

Invasive annual grasses (e.g. cheatgrass, medusahead rye, ventenata) have been invading and dominating grass communities across the west for decades. The loss of native perennial grass communities has impacted many wildlife species and stopping the spread of invasive grasses has been the focus of work by many state and federal natural resource agencies. Specifically at PWSWA, OSU is evaluating the efficacy of post-fire herbicide application and annual grass and forb/shrub re-seeding as an invasive grass control strategy. To date, the Department's John Day Wildlife Habitat Program has treated more than 12,500 acres with select herbicides targeting invasive annual grasses. While short term control (1-2 years) has been achieved in select sites, landscape level reestablishment of desirable grass, forb, and shrub species will take much longer. Additional restoration efforts are continuing and PWSWA staff, in coordination with Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District, are also evaluating test plots of a new chemical herbicide and its impacts on reestablishment of desirable species.

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