

Dear Representative Ken Helm, House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, and Water

I would like to address HB 4127. I am opposed to the bill going through unless there are guidelines as to how the money will be allocated. I do not think any money should go to missing cattle. More money needs to be given to non-lethal practices and confirmed depredations.

My name is Shella DelCurto. I serve on the Baker County Wolf Compensation Committee. My husband Barry and I are ranchers in Halfway, OR. We are a family run operation with no employees. We run cattle in wolf country. Did we ask for this? No, but we are trying to make the best of it. We have learned to co-exist with our wolf neighbors. We have had some depredations, but have learned to utilize range riding with great success. Since we have stepped up our range riding we no longer have depredations. Our range riding program has us basically living with our cattle from April 15 thru June 15. We reported one confirmed depredation and two missing calves the first year we had depredations in 2018. In 2019 we had two separate depredations. Both years depredations happened was because the human presence was not on the range. Since then we have been coming home with all accounted for. We attribute this to the fact that we are always in our cattle. We have extremely tough ground to ride. It is very steep rugged ground above the mouth of North Pine in the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area on the Joseph Loop Road. We are running on approx. 500 acres of private ground and forego running on our spring forest permit, which is approx. 7500 acres, as our wolves den up on us. I will say we are in a unique situation compared to our neighboring ranchers since we come back to irrigated pastures for the rest of the summer. This makes for extremely challenging times.

Our range riding now consists of gathering our cattle every evening and pushing them to lower ground at a tent site we have set up. The cattle have learned this is where they spend their nights. We make sure someone spends every night with the cattle. Our gather takes several riders every evening as they have to spread out across the range to find all of the cattle. We keep diaries of our range riding and turn in the time for compensation. By changing how we run our cattle we are better utilizing our range with intensive grazing, getting the bulls with the whole group of cows at the start of breeding season, and seeing all of our cattle so that we can check for sickness on the range. As a result we are finding we have more cows bred come fall, more calves born at the start of our calving season, and heavier calves when we sell in the fall.

Yes we are seeing a success, but to what cost? Our range riding expenses run anywhere from \$11,000-\$20,000 a year. Can we afford not to do this? The answer is simple, no we cannot afford to do this. The only thing that makes it possible is with the compensation program. I think the non-lethal side of the program needs an increase.

Unfortunately the compensation program needs fixed. Yes you can pour more money into it, but it will still have flaws. There are not enough checks and balances required from producers to verify claims. The confirmed depredations are easy to pay out on. The shaky ground is with **missing cattle**. I for one think that option should be removed from the program. It is too easy for producers to blame every death on the wolf. We are a landscape rich with cougars and bears to name a few predators, who also prey on livestock. You also see poor management from some ranchers as they fail to ride and take care of their cattle. Not everyone is this way, but there are some. There are those who would rather shoot a wolf as to try to change what they are doing and learn how to co-exist with them.

When we first started having wolves claims were turned in the Baker County wolf committee from several of the ranchers who were having problems. One rancher turned in a \$40,000 claim on missing cattle. The claim was sent back and they re-evaluated it and reduced it to \$20,000. There was no

verification of any cattle numbers turned out or what actually came home. This took place on the forest allotment above Halfway. Keep in mind this was the first year this producer had ran his cattle in the area, these were cattle that had never been here so they didn't know where to go. To me this looked like a case of poor management.

This case resulted in OPB doing a story on it and calling this a fraudulent case. There was a big story on it. It has made Baker County look bad. Right or wrong if we did not have the missing piece there would be no controversy.

This year we just had our reports turned in and I have a rancher claiming \$12,000 lost in missing cattle. Mind you this rancher never called ODFW to report any problems. The rancher was told he had a bone pile and to my knowledge he made no effort to clean that up. In the early spring this rancher said he had to put down two cows due to wolf damage and yet he never called ODFW to have them come and investigate the situation. He is requesting \$1200 for non confirmed loss. There were wolves in the area due to his bone pile. Come April the same rancher brought his cattle to Halfway from their winter range in Richland. He again claims he has missing cattle. His neighbors around him on the same spring range were having no problems. The rancher again did not call ODFW. ODFW reports no wolf collars located in that area at any time.

During the 2021 year various wolf packs had depredated more than normal. We have had producers in our area doing more non-lethal measures than ever before. Range riding dollars have been through the roof. At our last meeting we had \$41,145 requested for non-lethal measures used by producers. Unfortunately the county only had \$13,500 to split up between the ranchers requesting funding. In the past Baker County has paid out 50% of a producers request. As the statute reads anyone can be paid for doing range riding or whatever form of non-lethal measures that a producer finds that works for their situation. We have producers who can't afford to hire anyone extra so they are doing all of their own range riding. The county committee divied out the funds on a willy nilly basis. They gave one producer a little over 50% of funds requested and then divided up the rest of the funding with no set path. This is not the way the program is supposed to work. This is a prime example of where changes need to occur at the state level.

I feel that if money is going to be put into the program then give more money to our counties that are having more problems this year than ever for non-lethal measures. Let the counties payout to make up for the excess work, time, effort that is being put into trying to co-exist with the wolves. This has been a hardship on all of us. Please do not put more money into missing cattle where it is too hard to verify the cause of the missing.

If you want to help the program examine Montanas wolf compensation program. Call George Edwards and learn from him how they have been successful for multiple years. Oregon is the only state where they pay for missing cattle. Some of the other states have multipliers that are paid out on confirmed depredations. Everyone else knows it is too hard to confirm missing cattle. If this bill goes through I hope there are guidelines on how the money is spent. I know producers could use more money for non-lethal this year. Again I stress that paying for missing cattle sets us up for fraud cases. A small percentage could be allocated to missing but I know that there will be opposition to this bill if very much money goes toward missing cattle. This is just an area where it is too hard to prove cause of death. Now would be a good opportunity to get wolf advocacy groups to work with you if more non-lethal funds were allocated to the program.

I would like to see the compensation program become a single state committee that looks over all of the applications and decides with a good set of guidelines how to award the funding. Producers should not have to be paid on the whim of a county committee who makes up their own rules on payouts. Wallowa County is an example of this also. The county hires a range rider for a group of producers to watch the cattle. I know of a producer who is not in the area where this range rider works so doesn't get the benefit of this. The producer hired their own range rider to help out and then when they applied for compensation were denied because it wasn't the county hired rider. The county rider didn't ride in their range. They should have been compensated. Fortunately now they have finally gotten some help from another group to help pay for their range rider. Again this is a county doing what they want, not what the program was intended for.

I know this was more than just about HB 4127 but I hope this little bit of history has helped you understand where I am coming from. This program needs fixed. I don't expect that to happen with this bill. I just want you to be aware from a producers point of view what we are experiencing. HB 4127 could be a good thing if funds are allocated wisely and guidelines spelling out how they are used. Get wolf advocacy groups on board with an increase in non-lethal funds to producers. Lets all learn to co-exist. I am just afraid that too much of the money will go to missing cattle and this to me would be counter productive.

Thank you for taking the time to read this and considering my thoughts. My husband and I would be willing to talk to you about the compensation program. We would love to share how we do our range riding and show you our area.

Sincerely,



Shella DelCurto