

Submitter: Dan and Jan Blair

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, and Water

Measure: HB4127

TO COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

As rural Oregonians who have some second-hand experience with cattle ranching (Jan's sister and brother-in-law were for many years cattle ranchers in Montana), we have a strong objection to our taxpayer dollars paying ranchers for unverifiable claims of livestock losses. We perhaps have a somewhat bleak view of government compensation, since our brother-in-law was strongly opposed to government help in any form with his ranching operations. However, there was merit in his objections, and some of our objections to HB 4127 include:

* The Wolf Compensation Program is now 10 years old. It has never been reviewed or revised, despite the fact that some ranchers are concerned about the lack of transparency when it comes to claiming "missing" livestock. High Country News, to which we have subscribed since 2006, had an excellent article about these Wolf Compensation Funds a few years ago. OPB also did some excellent investigative journalism, finding that: ". . . state and county officials do not take all the necessary steps to confirm claims of missing livestock and ensure a limited money pool flows toward legitimate claims of wolf kills. That can mean less money to prevent wolf conflicts, and less money for documented losses. With no consistent system for verifying unfound livestock losses, the state has little way of knowing for sure whether it's denying some ranchers their due compensation or paying out claims it shouldn't." It appears to us that throwing \$1 million at the fund, without some really sincere efforts at revising the program to ensure both accountability and transparency, could easily be a total waste of taxpayer dollars.

* Oregon is the only state to have such a fund. "Missing" livestock is a nebulous adjective, and can result from a number of causes. The recent discovery of cattle left on an allotment in Wallowa County weeks beyond the date they should've been rounded up, where they died in deep snows, with the carcasses becoming an attractant to wolves, is a case in point. Ranchers are now rightly concerned that beef has become a new food source for wolves that heretofore had predated only on deer and elk. So the wolves, and we taxpayers, will pay for an out-of-state livestock owner's negligence. There have been some serious questions raised about how reported losses to wolves has far outpaced reports of wolves working in an area, and "missing" livestock with no carcasses discovered raises a few questions. [See High Country News, July 23, 2018: "When Cattle Go Missing in Wolf Territory, Who Should Pay the Price?"] The present program is rife with the opportunity for abuse.

* \$400,000 was allocated for this compensation fund last year, and has not been fully disbursed. What possible reason could there be to expand that fund by an additional \$1 million?

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment. We ask that you give our concerns your most serious and thoughtful consideration. Vote NO on HB 4127.

Sincerely,

Dan Blair Jan Blair