



February 7, 2022

Chair Helm and Committee members

I am Bethany Cotton, Conservation Director for Cascadia Wildlands. Cascadia Wildlands has long engaged in wolf advocacy and policy setting in Oregon, including in the development of the Oregon wolf plan and the wolf compensation fund. We remind the committee that the fund was established to facilitate tolerance for wolves' return to their native habitats in Oregon when wolves still enjoyed legal protections that forbid killing wolves for conflicts with livestock. Those protections are no longer in place in large parts Oregon, and ranchers have recourse and support from ODFW to address conflicts.

On behalf of our more than 12,000 members and supporters, we are deeply concerned that the structure of the bill and the lack of safeguards will exacerbate the existing problems within the Wolf Compensation Fund, and worse yet, may well cause new problems.

Paying producers for injured or dead animals without any determination that wolves are in fact at fault undermines the integrity of the ODFW's science-based protocol for determining the cause of death and injury to livestock, artificially inflates the percentage of loss attributed to wolves, and reduces the incentives for producers to practice good animal husbandry and utilize proven effective non-lethal coexistence tools. Worse yet, attributing lost animals to wolves, without any indication that the animals are dead, let alone that wolves are to blame, creates a perverse incentive whereby ranchers are incentivized not to look for missing animals and make claims against the fund instead. Dr. Treves - Director of the Carnivore Coexistence Laboratory who has studied the impact of wolf compensation programs on wolf tolerance, refers to this phenomenon as a "moral hazard:" that negligent owners will reduce protections for their domestic animals because they reason the government will pay them.

This could lead to increased incidents of livestock left on the range. Those animals could die of exposure or disease and their carcasses, left out could in fact attract wolves. The legislature could very well make worse the very problem it is seeking to address.

Our concerns about how easily this fund could be abused are borne out by the data. In 2021 ODFW determined just 50 cows, sheep and goats to be either confirmed or likely predations or injuries caused by wolves, yet 697 missing livestock claims were made, based mostly on anecdote. Making the fund easier to abuse is not a solution. Allocating additional funds on the heels of the 2021 sessions' \$400,000 allocation is unnecessary and ill-advised. Changes are more appropriately made via the 5-year revision to the Oregon Wolf Plan due next year.

Accordingly, we urge you to oppose HB 4127.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bethany Cotton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bethany Cotton, JD

Conservation Director

Cascadia Wildlands

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