

Representative Marsh and Environment and Natural Resources Committee Members, regarding HB 4080

My name is Ron Hjort, I live just north of Oakland, Oregon and raise cattle, sheep and hay. I am passed (because of the Sunset) Chair of the Douglas County Predator Damage Control District Board. In 2014 Dan Dawson, Sharon Waterman and Craig Starr met with me around my kitchen table and discussed ways we might propose to help Counties with their funding short falls particularly in regards to Predator Management. We came up with a novel idea to create a Predator Damage Control District. Since our concept needed Legislation, we asked and received support, (along with the Oregon Farm Bureau and other groups) in the form of sponsorship from Representatives Mckeown, Heard, Krieger, Olson and Senator Girod. With their shepherding through both the House and the Senate the bill (HB3188) passed the 2015 Legislature almost unanimously. The bill established a process that allowed for the creation of Predator Districts. These Districts would have willing landowners voluntarily to opt in/out as they choose, it allowed for the creation of a Predator Control District Board, it allowed a fee assessment on acreage each property owner wanted in the district, it restricted the expenditures of the assessment collected to only be used for Predator Management by the County. This was a unique way of creating District and is the first of this type in Oregon. Today we have two such Districts in Oregon, Douglas and Coos Counties. Presently Douglas County has 288 property owners with 104,000 acres in the District and Coos County has 132 property owners representing 201,000 acres of land in their District. Both of these Districts are vital in the creation of revenue to support the County Predator Management programs. Having these Districts create a revenue stream frees up the funding need for other County services such as Law Enforcement and Public Health programs, and other vital services the Counties perform.

When we created the concept and subsequent Bill, we were unsure how it would fair with those that need Predator services, and would they be willing to voluntarily to pay a fee (or Tax if you will) for this type of program. Since we were unsure, and it was Pilot Program, we believed having a Sunset Clause was needed in case we were not successful. Well, by the numbers mentioned above and the reception of the program we can report it has been extremely successful. Therefore, we are asking that HB 4080 make our Districts become permanent. HB 4080 does not change any of our original concept, it simply makes existing Districts stay in place.

Previously there has been discussion and misunderstanding about the Predator Management Program undertaken by Wildlife Services for each County. Wildlife Services practices non-lethal Wildlife Management and all their work is publicly available for review. They use Integrated Wildlife Management approach before using any other methods of control. They work on problem areas and remove only those predators that are causing problems. I have used them for over 30 years and they have been invaluable regarding the issues I have had. Without them I would be overrun with predators and out of the sheep business. Just this past month I lost 10 lambs to predators. Others in our Districts have lost far more than I have and they need help also. I have tried to outline the highlights of how our Predator Districts were created, why they are setup the way they are, and how they function and the need for them. The necessity to reinstate existing Districts and pass HB 4080 from the Committee to the floor for Vote is of the up most importance. I Thank You for the opportunity to listen to what I have to say and appreciate the work that you do. I Thank Representative Goodwin for introducing this Bill.

Sincerely,

Ron Hjort