Oregon
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To: The Honorable Jeff Golden, Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources

Senate Bill 69
Brian Wolfer, Acting Wildlife Division Administrator
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide information related to Senate Bill 69, and has no position on the bill. Senate Bill 69 would require the Department to develop and adopt by rule an invasive grass pilot program on the Phillip W. Schneider Wildlife Area (PWSWA) to increase habitat quality and quantity for mule deer and livestock while increasing site resistance to annual grass invasion.

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.

Invasive annual grasses (e.g., cheatgrass, medusahead rye, ventenata) have been invading and dominating grass communities across the west for several decades. The loss of native perennial grass communities has impacted habitat for many wildlife species. Stopping the spread of invasive grasses has been a primary component of rangeland research and the focal point of work by many state and federal natural resource agencies. The Department is leading these efforts across the entire Murderers Creek Basin and provides collaborative assistance to interested private land and federal land managers.

Treatment of invasive annual grasses has been a particular focus at PWSWA for a number of years, serving as a model for research and control of these invasives. Since 2015, ODFW has contracted with Oregon State University, Brigham Young University and the Oregon Experiment Station to complete three multiyear research projects geared towards post wildfire recovery. These research efforts, totaling more than $1.6M mainly through federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds, included native seed enhancement for better germination rates and effective reestablishment of native grasses after removal of juniper and invasive annual grass control. To date, the Department's John Day Wildlife Habitat Program has treated more than 12,500 acres with select herbicides targeting invasive annual grasses and completed reseeding of desirable grass and shrubs across more than 10,000 acres on PWSWA. Department staff, in coordination with Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District, have been evaluating test plots of a new chemical herbicide and its potential benefits in controlling annual grasses. While short term control (one to two years) has been achieved in select sites, landscape level reestablishment of desirable grass, forb, and shrub species will take much longer. The forested and shrubsteppe habitats have also been heavily impacted by juniper encroachment and removal efforts have treated more than 3,000 acres. The

Department also continues to monitor vegetative changes and mule deer response to habitat changes resulting from the restoration efforts.

The habitat management and rangeland research actions on PWSWA provide a collaborative resource for the challenges facing neighboring public and private lands across the Murderers Creek basin in changing climate conditions now and into the future. 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 and tag revenue and federal Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds. Key partnerships include Oregon State University, Grant County Soil and Water Conservation District, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, local watershed council, and Oregon Hunters Association.

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