



03.23.2023

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water
900 Court St NE
Salem, Oregon

Sub: Testimony in **opposition of HB 2631** (wolf depredation compensation fund bill)

Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Hartman and Owens and Members of the Committee,

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Cascadia Wildlands, Oregon Wild, Center for Biological Diversity, Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Endangered Species Coalition, and the Oregon Conservation Network. We **oppose** HB 2631.

The wolf depredation and compensation fund has been a legislative issue every session because of controversies around the accountability and transparency around payments. It has also become an issue that fractures already frayed relationships among stakeholder groups. One of the main challenges around the program is its payments for “missing livestock” which do not require any proof of missing cattle or sheep or proof of wolf activity/depredation. Session after session, we have not been able to find a fix that would address the challenges in the program while helping ranchers who are actually effected by loss.

The “missing livestock” piece has been the most challenging component – it is ineffective and stems distrust for the program. Livestock go missing for many reasons, assuming missing livestock were taken by wolves is not a logical conclusion. Proving number of missing livestock as well as drawing causal relationship of missing livestock to wolves is near impossible, which is

why allowing payments for missing livestock is an inefficient use of the fund's money. We would support the missing livestock component being taken out of the program via this bill; however, HB 2631 adds another controversial component – a multiplier. A multiplier simply means multiplying the market value of a cow or sheep by a certain number when compensating a rancher. Hence, a seven multiplier (proposed in the bill) means paying seven times the fair market value of a cow or sheep.

The bill proposes a seven multiplier and the -1 and -3 amendments propose a five multiplier. We **oppose** both for the following reasons:

- If the multiplier is considered a substitute for covering “missing livestock” payments, it defeats the purpose of removing the current most controversial aspect of the program. Indeed, applying a multiplier is arguably worse. Missing livestock payments are anything between 16 cents to 50 cents on the dollar in a given year. Adding a 5 or 7 multiplier to the full market value of cattle is a significant increase from current missing livestock payments.
- Applying a multiplier to the fair market value creates a perverse incentive. If a \$2,000 cow is worth \$10,000 or \$14,000 when it is killed by a wolf, there is no incentive for ranchers to protect livestock from depredations. Multipliers incentivise poor animal husbandry behaviour because a cow or sheep killed by a wolf is worth significantly more than if sold in the market.
- It is also unfair to ranchers who are trying to do the right thing by preventing conflict and using effective non-lethal tools. Such ranchers are decreasing livestock deaths by preventing conflicts, but as a result of this bill, their cattle would be worth significantly less than those of ranchers who fail to use coexistence methods and experience depredations. This perverse outcome undermines the purpose of the fund.
- The bill also pays for livestock guardian dogs at the same level of multiplier. There are far fewer livestock guardian dogs on the landscape than livestock and a rancher would know when one is lost. The multiplier in case of guardian dogs makes no sense.

Simply put, this bill incentivises poor animal husbandry practices and failure to use non-lethal coexistence tools by making depredations financially beneficial. The goal of the fund is to promote tolerance and coexistence. Multipliers of any degree, and certainly one of 5 or 7, fundamentally undermine that purpose.

Despite weeks of genuine efforts by the conservation community to negotiate and get HB 2631 to a better place, the bill ultimately fails to address the concerns around the multiplier.

We urge the committee to not move this bill because more work needs to be done and there is still no agreement among stakeholders on the bill's language. The legislative session is a very small window of time to have meaningful discussion. Since conversations are taking place

now, we ask the committee to not derail it and **if no agreement can be reached on the amendments, then we request the committee initiate a workgroup** where we will have more time to discuss this, especially given the Oregon Wolf Plan is coming up for revision later this year.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bethany Cotton".

Bethany Cotton

bethany@cascwild.org on behalf of:

Cascadia Wildlands

Endangered Species Coalition

Oregon Wild

Center for Biological Diversity

Humane Society of the United States

Humane Voters Oregon

Oregon Conservation Network

Oregon League of Conservation Voters