



Northwest Office

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March 23, 2023

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

RE: Testimony in opposition to HB 2631 (Wolf Depredation Compensation Fund bill)

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

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders), I am submitting the following comments in opposition to HB 2631, which proposes to compensate producers for loss or injury to livestock or working dogs with a seven times multiplier. I urge the Committee to **not pass this bill or consider amendments -1 and -3** as including these significant multipliers for confirmed and probable livestock losses undermine efforts to address the current challenges in the Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance Grant Program (Program).

As a wildlife conservation organization that works with local communities to promote coexistence with wildlife (including wolves), Defenders recognizes the importance of compensation as important tool in the toolbox for landowners and livestock producers. In fact, in 1987 Defenders established a wolf-livestock conflict compensation fund in western states to support producers before states developed their own compensation programs. In 2011, Defenders was one of the stakeholder groups that developed the legislation which established a state level compensation program in Oregon. In 2020, we identified problems with the current Program and collaborated with eastern Oregon producers to propose solutions that would streamline the process, address the issues of transparency and accountability, and ensure the program was useful to producers (e.g., expedited direct loss payments). We developed a proposal that was shared with Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA), the Governor's office and county level stakeholders. ODA hosted a multi-stakeholder meeting during summer of 2020 using the proposal as a starting point of a dialogue to reform the Program. Therefore, we have a history and motivation to support an efficient and functioning compensation program in the state.

Defenders recognizes the challenge Oregon state has in reforming the Program to meet the needs of livestock producers while addressing the concerns of the general public. However, we **oppose HB 2631 (7 times multiplier) and amendments -1 and -3 (5 times multiplier)** for the following reasons:

- The vast majority of producers in Oregon will not have 5-7 missing livestock for every 1 confirmed or probable depredation, and there is no way to confirm these losses were caused by wolves. These funds are better spent on expediting direct loss and non-lethal claims.
- Any payment that is more than double the fair market value is a perverse incentive. If a \$2000 cow is worth \$10,000 or \$14,000 when it is killed by a wolf, there is significantly less incentive to proactively protect the cattle from depredations using non-lethal tools and strategies.
- The original bill and amendments -1 and -3 include the same multipliers for working dogs. Producers know when they lose a working dog to wolves, therefore a multiplier is an unnecessary waste of funds that would be better spent on direct loss and non-lethal claims.



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- The 7 times multiplier is based off merely one 2003 study¹ in an area of recurring wolf-livestock conflict in Idaho that does not appropriately reflect wolf-livestock conflict management Oregon. Even in this high conflict area, the study showed only 1 of 5 producers involved experienced losses (<5 calves total) and no proactive non-lethal tools to prevent livestock losses were documented. In Oregon, most producers also experience no losses to wolves annually and are encouraged to use proactive non-lethal strategies, which reduce livestock losses further. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that most, if any, producers would experience up to 7 missing cattle to wolf depredation in a given year.

Defenders is committed to participating and collaborating in any effort that would reform the Program and believes the multistakeholder discussions ODA facilitated in 2020 were ended prematurely. **We strongly recommend the Committee oppose HB 2631 and move this discussion to a work group** where we will have more time to discuss this, especially as the Oregon Wolf Plan is coming up for revision later this year.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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¹ Oakleaf, J. K., C. Mack, and D. L. Murray. 2003. Effects of wolves on livestock calf survival and movements in central Idaho. *Journal of Wildlife Management* 67:299–306.