



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

Subject: Testimony in **opposition** of HB 2631 (as well as -1 and -3 amendment)

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

My name is Dr Sristi Kamal and I am the Deputy Director at Western Environmental Law Center (WELC). I am submitting this testimony in opposition of HB 2631 and its -1 and -3 and wanted to add some context as to why.

I have been working on the wolf compensation fund and ways to reform it for several years now. I fully realize that the fund is not meeting the producers' needs because of delayed payments and at the same time there are concerns around the accountability and transparency of the program because of its controversial "missing livestock" payments. Up until now, conservation groups had offered increase in appropriations to the program in exchange for getting rid of the controversial missing livestock component. I have also watched this issue implode in multiple legislative sessions and it only polarizes perspectives to a point that it becomes impossible to have a dialogue.

I want to highlight that there is no science behind a multiplier – it is purely a political decision. The only research conducted on what might be a suitable multiplier was one single research conducted in Wyoming in a heavy wolf-livestock conflict area where no non-lethal deterrence methods were implemented or even attempted – not a model we want to emulate. For comparison, this is where other western states are in their multipliers:

Washington: WA is probably the **closest to OR** in landscape, wolf population, livestock community and animal husbandry practices.

- 100% compensation for confirmed or probable livestock loss in allotments of 100 acres or less
- 200% (or 2x multiplier) compensation for confirmed or probable livestock loss in allotments larger than 100 acres
- No multiplier for livestock guardian dog compensation
- No missing livestock payments

Montana: no multiplier, and they **audit** the program

The Montana Livestock Loss Board is mandated to “perform or contract for the performance of periodic program audits and reviews of program expenditures”. Because the program is part of the Montana Department of Livestock they participate in the agency’s overall audit, which chooses sections of the agency to audit every other year (Seth Wilson, personal communication).

Wyoming: WY has a 7 multiplier **for calves only**. This is based on the one and only research that looked at wolf depredations in a chronic wolf depredation area **with no non-lethal deterrence** (which is a model we should not promote if we want to achieve coexistence).

Idaho: No multiplier; no compensation for probable loss (confirmed loss only); 50% match in cash or kind by applicant

Despite our attempts, there was no compromise on the multiplier in the current bill

- A seven or even five multiplier is a perverse incentive where a livestock is worth significantly more when it is killed by wolves than being sold in the market. E.g. at a 5 multiplier, a \$2000 cattle is now worth \$10,000 if it is killed by a wolf. This is a dangerous precedent to set and one that will not end well for producers or for wolves.
- Missing livestock payments ranges from 16 cents to 50 cents on the dollar, depending on how much money is left in the program after paying for direct loss compensation and non-lethal tools. This multiplier is significantly larger than the missing livestock payments because they are seven (or five) times payments on the full market value of cattle.
- Additionally, the multiplier will make ranching less profitable for producers who are actually implementing non-lethal tools and preventing conflicts. While they managed to prevent a predation by wolf with their good conflict prevention practices, their cattle will now be worth at least five times less than their neighbor who isn’t implementing non-lethal tools and faces predation by wolves.

If you move this bill with or without the -1/ -3 amendments, I am very concerned that all the hard work that went into getting a dialogue started will be lost and we will be back to our usual polarized corners. Other alternatives have been proposed and submitted (HB 2633 and its -3 amendment). The hearing on this bill is premature – although productive conversations were taking place, we couldn’t get to a point of agreement. We needed more time. I urge the legislature to therefore allow more time to the stakeholders to discuss this bill and the other alternative in HB 2633 -3, or give us a workgroup so we can start afresh. I urge you to find a middle ground.

Thank you for taking my testimony into consideration. I am happy to provide further clarification or address any questions you might have (kamal@westernlaw.org)

Sincerely

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