



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

**Subject:** Testimony in opposition of base bill HB 2366 (and neutral toward -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 2366 but draw attention to its -3 amendment 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. I have watched this issue implode in multiple legislative sessions and it only polarizes perspectives to a point that it becomes impossible to have a dialogue.

This is why I was very grateful for the opportunity to engage with the bill proponent, Rep Bobby Levy, who initiated a discussion on the components of this bill and explore if any solution was at all possible. I therefore engaged in good faith to try and achieve the best possible outcome. While significant progress was made on other administrative issues, the final sticking point was the multiplier in the bill – something we could not agree on. I have presented my reasons on opposing HB 2631 in a written testimony submitted under the bill (for reference, HB 2631 is the other bill related to the wolf depredation compensation fund with a multiplier) but I summarize it here as follows:

- 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.

-3 amendment to HB 2633 is an alternative to HB 2631 presented to the legislature that also has a multiplier. It was one of my discussion points during the many conversations with the bill proponents in the past months. Specifically, it includes:

- A 2 multiplier or 200% payment of fair market value for adult female and calves because of the opportunity cost when they are predated on
- All other payments will continue in a full 100% payment of fair market value.

To clarify, the position of the conservation community in the past has been around increasing appropriations to the fund in exchange for removing "missing livestock" from statute. The multiplier was never in discussion. Any multiplier is an incentive that makes it financially lucrative if cattle is predated on by wolves than sold in the market. It is a business model where depredation by wolves is more financially viable than preventing conflict because no depredation means less value for your cattle if you have to sell it in the market.

However, I can consider -3 amendment as a compromise and a perhaps a middle ground. I can also support expedited payments for direct loss where ranchers get paid faster than the current system of annual payments. Quarterly payments would make most sense, if that's administratively feasible for Oregon Department of Agriculture.

I would like to conclude with the fact that this session, I am coming to you with not just opposition and no solution, but opposition and two potential solutions: If you could give stakeholders more time to come together in a workgroup and work this out, that would be most ideal. The Wolf Plan revision is coming up this fall and tying the revision of this program to the revision of the Wolf Plan would be logical. If not, then I would urge you to consider appropriations increase in the fund against removing "missing livestock". Finally, -3 of HB 2633 is still a better alternative to HB 2631 and the path of least conflict for stakeholder groups.

We still have a rare opportunity to bring a meaningful change to the program. Instead of the usual polarized "oppose/support" stance by different stakeholder groups, we were able to have discussions that show promise. I urge this committee today to take the neutral position on -3 of HB 2633 as a significant progress from past sessions. If you move any version of HB 2631 I am afraid all stakeholder groups will end up where we have always been – isolated in our corners and defensive of our values.

Thanking you

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