



Oregon

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**To: The Honorable Ken Helm, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water**

House Bill 3052

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Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) appreciates the opportunity to provide information relevant to House Bill 3052-1 and has no position on the bill.

With the -1 amendment, HB 3052 establishes a task force to investigate elk and deer damage in eight eastern Oregon counties and make recommendations to the legislature on a three-year pilot program for deer and elk damage compensation funding. The pilot program would be overseen by the Department of Agriculture. The ODFW Director would appoint one voting member of the task force to represent ODFW.

By statute, ODFW must manage native wildlife species, including deer and elk, to prevent serious depletion of any species and to provide optimum recreational and aesthetic benefit (ORS 496.012). Additionally, by statute, it is the policy of the state that appropriate measures be taken to assist farmers, ranchers, and others in solving wildlife damage problems and that the various levels of government involved in wildlife damage should mutually cooperate in their efforts (ORS 610.005).

In furthering the policies of the state related to deer and elk populations and associated agricultural damage, ODFW has convened and participated in numerous stakeholder engagement processes at local and statewide levels. This includes development of species management plans to establish population management objectives, development of hunting regulations, and development of programs that provide preference for landowners to obtain hunting tags for controlled hunts and to resolve damage.

ODFW is committed to working cooperatively with landowners to resolve wildlife conflict. This includes developing hunting seasons as a long-term tool by which landowner can utilize licensed hunters to address conflicts with deer and elk. The full array of options to utilize licensed hunters include general and controlled seasons designed to address localized populations and anticipated agricultural conflicts, emergency hunts to address unanticipated damage, and the Landowner Preference (LOP) program to give preference to landowners when tag availability is limited.

Specific to elk, ODFW administers the Oregon Landowner Damage Program, established in ORS 496.158, which allows local ODFW staff to issue tags with an antlerless bag limit to hunters of the landowner's choosing to alleviate damage. In 2020, ODFW established a general season antlerless elk damage hunt providing a general season antlerless elk hunting opportunity in select areas with chronic damage from resident elk herds. This hunt provides an opportunity for landowners to utilize hunters in an expanded time frame without the need to engage with ODFW staff to verify that damage is occurring.

ODFW staff actively engage with landowners and agricultural producers to provide advice on techniques that can be employed to reduce deer and elk damage and issue harassments and kill permits as appropriate. When funding is available, ODFW has provided assistance to landowners experiencing damage including providing fencing materials to protect haystacks and fertilizer for pastures. Currently, there are no programs that provide direct payment to landowners as compensation for damage from deer and elk.

Elk damage to agricultural areas is a complex issue, largely caused by elk population distribution on private versus public land, particularly in the eight counties identified in the -1 amendments. Factors influencing elk distribution include reduced habitat conditions and elk security on public lands, disturbance from motorized vehicles and other activities on public lands and changing landownership affecting elk distribution and tolerance on private lands.

Improving elk distribution at the landscape level will take landscape level solutions and collaboration between private landowners, public land managers, tribes, ODFW, and other partners. Collaborative groups such as proposed in this bill can provide a venue for private landowners, ODFW, and other partners to hear new ideas, review current approaches, and develop potential future strategies.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide background information related to HB 3052-1.

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