



February 8, 2024

Chair Helm, Vice-Chair Hartman, and members of the House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water Committee:

Our organizations represent Oregon’s agricultural community and broader natural resource sector. Within our memberships, we’re proud to represent producers utilizing a wide variety of production practices, from organic and conventional to everything in between. From nurseries and wheat to hazelnuts and blueberries, our members are directly involved in farming, ranching, and agribusiness across every county in Oregon.

Please Support HB 4061 – Directs the State Department of Agriculture to establish an elk damage prevention and compensation pilot program.

We are supportive of establishing an Elk Damage Prevention and Compensation Pilot Program.

Recovery of elk between 1920 and 1980 was facilitated by regulated hunting and low numbers of large predators. By 1980, elk numbers were estimated at 56,000 head, and elk were present throughout the state. According to the most recent population surveys done by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife¹, elk numbers in Oregon have increased to an estimated 72,000 head east of the cascades, and 55,000 west of the cascades.

It is believed the current escalating depredation of private land reflects a change in elk distribution caused primarily by 1) high numbers of elk, 2) the inherent nature of elk to seek out quality habitat, 3) the decline in quality of forest and grassland habitat on public land, 4) the large and increasing number of large predators (wolves, cougar, black bear) and 5) increasing human intrusion caused by longer hunting seasons and recreational activities. However, all the above factors influence elk behavior relative to distribution and depredation of private land.

The Pilot Program will help to inform as well as recognize best practice and response to depredation on private land and provide a future model recognizing the economic impact to land managers across the state. The above-referenced natural resource associations support HB 4061 and the funding necessary to implement the pilot program. We urge your support and an “Aye” vote.

¹ <https://myodfw.com/articles/big-game-population-survey-data>