

February 10, 2025

Dear Oregon Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire,

We are writing to express our support for the urgent need to provide increased compensation to livestock owners who suffer financial losses due to wolf depredation. As a Soil & Water Conservation board, we have witnessed firsthand the significant toll that wolf predation is taking on rural communities. We urge you to consider the broader socioeconomic effects, the challenges facing landowners, and the negative consequences on land ownership and its fragmentation.

The return of wolves to certain regions, while valuable for wildlife conservation, has placed tremendous pressure on ranchers and farmers who rely on livestock as their primary income source. The loss of animals to wolf depredation creates both immediate financial setbacks and long-term uncertainties, which are especially damaging to those of us living and working in rural areas. These predation events are not isolated incidents, and they can lead to cascading effects on the entire community.

The socioeconomic impacts of wolf predation on rural areas are profound. Livestock operations often serve as the backbone of local economies, creating jobs and supporting ancillary businesses such as feed suppliers, veterinarians, equipment dealerships, and local merchants. As ranchers lose livestock to wolves, they may be forced to reduce herd sizes or even exit the industry altogether. This leads to a decrease in local spending, job losses, and, in some cases, the abandonment of rural properties, which are vital to the region's economy and culture.

Furthermore, these challenges also affect the sustainability of landownership. Ranchers and farmers often manage large tracts of land, which are not just economic assets but also serve important environmental functions, such as soil conservation, wildlife habitat preservation, and water management. The growing pressure from wolves, combined with financial losses, discourages sustainable practices and responsible land stewardship. With reduced resources, landowners may be less able or willing to invest in the long-term health of their land, impacting both local ecosystems and the economic viability of their operations.

Perhaps most concerning is the risk of land fragmentation. As economic pressures mount, ranchers are increasingly faced with difficult decisions about whether they can continue to afford their land or maintain their operations. This can lead to the sale or division of family farms and ranches, contributing to the loss of open spaces and the fragmentation of larger, more ecologically viable landscapes. The fragmentation of these lands disrupts wildlife corridors, strains local infrastructure, and erodes the cultural and historical value of rural communities.

Given these multiple challenges, we strongly urge you to support increased compensation programs for those who experience losses due to wolf depredation. These compensation programs are essential not only for the financial stability of ranchers, but also for the long-term health of rural economies and landownership practices. Without such support, we risk further destabilizing the rural communities that are integral to the fabric of our state and nation.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We are hopeful that, with your leadership, we can find a solution that balances the conservation of wolves with the well-being of rural landowners and the sustainability of our agricultural lands.

Sincerely,

Scott Duffner, Chair

Fort Rock/Silver Lake Soil & Water Conservation District