

To
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR



Date: 03.01.2025

Sub: Testimony in opposition to SB 777 and its -1 amendment

Sen Golden Vice Chair Nash and Members of the Committee

My name is Sristi Kamal and I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of Western Environmental Law Center (WELC). These comments are in opposition of SB 777 and the -1 amendment, with the request that you allow stakeholders to work on this important but complex issue between sessions.

I have been engaged in the discussion on reforming the state Wolf Livestock Depredation Compensation Program for several years and while it is fraught with challenges and difference in perspectives, there are few things we can all agree on:

- The program isn't working effectively and efficiently in supporting ranchers to serve its intended purpose – to economically compensate ranchers and increase their tolerance to the presence of wolves on the landscape.
- The model instituted more than a decade ago worked when wolves were in a few counties but things have changed on the ground the previous model is proving to be less effective in handling, standardizing and expediting payments

The conversation on a multiplier fixates on one issue that needs to be considered in the context of the broader program. The concerns on the multiplier itself revolves around the fact that using it as proxy for missing livestock defeats the purpose of trying to address the problems of the “missing” livestock component currently in the statute – if “missing” livestock makes its way back into the statute with a multiplier then we didn't really address it.

The other concern raised with the multiplier is it being used as a proxy for indirect loss. Indirect loss (e.g. loss of weight, loss of reproductive success because of the presence of a carnivore) is hard to quantify and even harder to study for several reasons, including ethical reasons on conducting such studies on living animals. It is also difficult to establish a causal relationship – if in fact indirect loss is occurring, it is almost impossible to determine the cause as only wolves and not a sum total of changing environmental factors such as drought, wildfire, weather events, other predators, decreasing forage etc. Lastly, even if the hypothesis on indirect loss is assumed to be true, tying it to direct loss makes it impossible for

ranchers ranching in wolf territory who might be facing indirect loss to get the benefits of such payments unless they have an actual depredation event. Most ranchers in Oregon do not face a wolf depredation event, with the numbers staying consistently below 100 events/year, and data presented by ODFW mentioned that 65% of ranchers who faced a depredation in a given year faced it only once in that year. If the goal is to make indirect loss payments, then tying it to direct loss defeats the purpose.

Compensation is a tool in the toolbox along with other management strategies but currently in Oregon, the various wolf management strategies are working independently and in silos. This is mainly because wolf management is guided by the Oregon Wolf Plan and handled by Oregon Dept of Fish and Wildlife while compensation is handled by Dept of Agriculture. The Wolf Plan and its provisions for lethal take of wolves do not interreact with compensation and how payments are made. We hope that the two departments and the two programs can work complementary toward a common goal – coexistence with wolves on the landscape.

SB 777 focuses on very specific aspect of a complex problem that needs a more holistic look at the whole program. There has been attempts made to have a more comprehensive discussion on the program at the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water, especially after the 2024 session, but those conversations were cut short because of lack of engagement from the ranching community. I therefore request this committee to not move an incomplete concept forward and instead direct the interested parties to work together after this legislative session, and address the main concerns for all involved. This is an opportunity to improve the program where it serves its intended purpose, and reduce the further polarization of perspectives. I therefore urge you to not support SB 777 or the -1 amendment as written, and allow for more time for stakeholders to find a solution for the sake of Oregon's wolves and for the sake of people sharing the landscape with them.

I will be happy to address any questions you might have. I am available at kamal@westernlaw.org

Thanking you

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