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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

March 11, 2025

Re: SB 777 (Relating to the depredation of livestock)

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Colin Reynolds. I am the Senior Advisor to the Northwest Program at Defenders of Wildlife (“Defenders”). Defenders is a national conservation organization dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities, with over 40,000 members and supporters in Oregon. On behalf of Defenders, I am submitting the following comments in opposition to SB 777 and amendment -5.¹ This bill and amendment -5 would modify Oregon’s existing Wolf Depredation Compensation Program (“Compensation Program” or “Program”) by:

- 1) Applying a multiplier of 5x the fair market value for the amount compensated for the loss or injury of cow calf or yearling, sheep or goat.
- 2) Applying a multiplier of 3x the fair market value for the amount compensated for the loss or injury of a cow.
- 3) Raising the minimum percentage of grant program funds distributed for financial assistance from 30% to 50%.
- 4) Establishing a ceiling of compensation of \$25,000 per livestock animal or working dog.

As an organization, we are dedicated to facilitating the coexistence between ranchers and wolves in Oregon. We recognize compensation plays a crucial role – alongside proactive conflict prevention tools, as part of Oregon’s integrated approach to addressing livestock losses caused by wolves. Together, our goal is to collaborate with local communities, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, and federal agencies to ensure those living alongside wolves have the necessary resources and support required to reduce conflict. This approach is essential for the long-term, sustainable recovery of wolf populations and the stability of local communities.

¹ This letter revises our letter in opposition to SB 777 and amendment -1 submitted to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire on February 13. To view the original letter, see <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/128253>.

Defenders is highly invested in the success of the Program and my colleagues and I have devoted significant amounts of time, energy and resources to make that a reality.

Specifically:

- In 1987, Defenders established a wolf-livestock conflict compensation fund in western states to support producers before states developed their own compensation programs.
- In 2011, Defenders was one of the stakeholder groups that developed the legislation which established a state-level compensation program in Oregon.
- In 2020, Defenders identified problems with the current Program and collaborated with eastern Oregon producers to propose solutions that would streamline the process, address the issues of transparency and accountability, and ensure the Program was useful to producers (e.g., expedited direct loss payments).
- In 2020, Defenders developed a proposal that was shared with the Oregon Department of Agriculture (“ODA”), the Governor’s office and county-level stakeholders on ways to reform the Program and participated in an ODA hosted a multi-stakeholder meeting to continue those discussions.
- In 2024, Defenders participated in a legislator-led Working Group to develop ideas for updating the Program.

Simply put, we have a history and motivation to support an efficient and functioning compensation program in the state.

Defenders recognizes the challenge Oregon has in reforming the Program to meet the needs of ranchers while ensuring it is a complement to wolf recovery. However, we oppose SB 777 and amendment -5, *as currently written*, for the following reasons:

In a time of limited finances, the 5x and 3x multiplier and the new \$25,000 ceiling of compensation per depredation claim endanger the fiscal stability of the Depredation Program. In 2023, the Oregon Department of Agriculture distributed approximately \$475,000 to counties, with approximately \$70,000 to loss compensation and about \$400,000 to prevention.² Statistically, about 15% of funds went to confirmed/probable death/injury of livestock and about 84% went to prevention.³ A 5x and a 3x multiplier, applied to even a small portion of the losses, would significantly increase the amount of funds distributed by the Program going to compensation. In a world where the Program’s funding limit remains at \$1,000,000, and compensation rates hit the new maximum limit of \$500,000 – leaving only \$500,000 for compensation, some counties may not be able to adequately support prevention requests. This situation may become more challenging in

² *Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management, 2023 Annual Report*, OREGON DEP’T OF FISH AND WILDLIFE 10 (2024), https://dfw.state.or.us/Wolves/docs/oregon_wolf_program/2023_Annual_Wolf_Report_4-2-24.pdf.

³ *Id.*

the event the wolf population continues to expand into new counties that have yet to join the Depredation Program and seek to fund basic prevention activities.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of non-lethal tools and the dedicated funding that supports proactive conflict prevention through the Program. Across other states with wolves, proven strategies such as range riding, fencing, and attractant removal remain essential for reducing conflict. In a time of difficult and uncertain financial circumstances, this is surely not the moment to make an unnecessary change to a Program and endanger its financial stability. Maintaining strong, consistent funding ensures that ranchers have the resources they need to minimize losses before they occur—an approach critical to both successful wolf recovery and thriving rural communities.

The 5x multiplier does not “fix” any problems with the Compensation Program. Several issues with the Compensation Program have surfaced, and this bill does not address those issues. For example, there are inefficiencies in the Program, and it can take up to a year for compensation claims to be paid. Other states, such as Montana, have a State Livestock Board that can standardize and pay claims expeditiously.

Testifiers in support of SB 777 also mentioned the indirect costs of living and working alongside wolves. The following are examples of testimony (emphasis added for clarity):

- *“Beyond these direct costs, **ranchers face hidden expenses as well.** We bear the burden of production losses when wolves kill our livestock. However, **the financial impacts go deeper, affecting our ability to maintain operations and sustain our livelihoods.** Managing the habitat for these animals, even when they cause harm to our herds, takes time away from our work on the ranch and puts additional strain on our resources. It's not just a matter of replacing lost livestock; **it's about the hidden, ongoing costs of protecting our operations from further damage,** as well as providing habitat for wildlife without losing the economic viability of our family businesses.”⁴*
- *“Engaging in wolf-livestock conflict reduction takes additional producer labor, time, and infrastructure. Given that wildlife is a public resource and the American public, as a whole, values the presence of diverse wildlife across the West, including large carnivores, funding sources for compensation should reflect the fact that these species are a public resource. Landowners face costs associated with production losses, and in addition, **landowners bear hidden costs to manage resources and time needed to engage in conflict reduction and provide habitat for wildlife.**”⁵*
- *Ranchers in Lake County have been burdened with more than the direct costs of livestock losses as a result of wolves. **Engaging in wolf-livestock conflict reduction takes additional producer labor, time, and infrastructure.** Given that wildlife is a public resource and the American public, as a whole, values the presence of diverse wildlife across the West, including large carnivores, funding*

⁴ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/125349>.

⁵ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/125389>.

*sources for compensation should reflect the fact that these species are a public resource. **Landowners face costs associated with production losses, and in addition, landowners bear hidden costs to manage resources and time needed to engage in conflict reduction and provide habitat for wildlife.***”⁶

As I mentioned in my testimony to the Committee on February 26, “my colleagues and I are ready to continue conversations on ways to improve the Program. No one wins if producers, who are doing what we ask of them in terms of employing non-lethal conflict reduction tools such as fladry, range riding, etc., if these producers do not feel like they are receiving the support they need.” As written, SB 777 does nothing to compensate landowners for indirect costs. SB 777 also does nothing to improve the Program’s efficiency. Defenders believes we should take an “all of the above” approach to improving the Program and come together to find real solutions to these problems.

A better course of action is to resume the paused 2024 Compensation Working Group. After last year’s multiplier bill failed to pass, several legislators created an ad hoc working group comprised of conservationists and ranchers. That working group failed to proceed to the phase where both stakeholders engaged in direct discussions. Defenders is confident a solution that benefits both ranchers and wolves is possible and is looking forward to restarting that conversation.

We are committed to participating and collaborating in any effort that would reform the Program and believe the working group discussions ended prematurely. We strongly recommend the Committee oppose SB 777 and amendment -5, *as currently written*, and move this discussion to a working group where we will be able to more adequately address current issues with the Program while ensuring long-term viability.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Colin Reynolds
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Defenders of Wildlife

⁶ <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/126098>.