



March 11, 2025

Sub: Testimony in opposition of SB 777 (wolf depredation compensation fund bill)

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash and committee members, for the record, I am Bethany Cotton, a fifth-generation Oregonian from rural southern Oregon now based in Eugene. I am Conservation Director for Cascadia Wildlands, a stakeholder organizations that has actively advocated for wolf conservation, recovery and coexistence since this native species naturally returned to Oregon. On behalf of our 12,000 members and supporters, we oppose SB 777 and the -1 and -5 amendments.

Oregon's wolf population has stagnated with a minimum count of just 178 wolves in 2023 and 2024, impacted by a serious poaching epidemic and aggressive agency authorized killings.

The Wolf Compensation Fund was designed to promote coexistence and achieve tolerance. Applying a multiplier undermines this purpose, would unnecessarily drain the fund and lead to ballooning future funding requests. Indeed, the companion funding bill SB 985 requests \$2 million dollars, more than double any previous allocation, and a 10-fold increase over the budget the program operated with for a decade. \$2 million is nearly double ODFW's wolf program budget. It's profoundly bad policy-making to drop millions into a dysfunctional compensation program that attempts to buy tolerance after the fact instead of investing in ODFW expert staff and tools to prevent conflict.

If this change in the program is indeed meant as a proxy for indirect loss – a concept that is not proven by science – its design is unfair because producers who are successfully coexisting – who are in the majority – could not access compensation without a death or injury. While the 50% minimum for non-lethal is theoretically good, last year nearly 80% of claims were for non-lethal tools, so we may actually see a decrease in allocation to non-lethal tools with a multiplier draining the fund.

Following the 2024 short session, I along with two of my colleagues participated in an informal working group at the request of Chair Helm and then Vice-Chair, now co-chair Owens. We met three times last summer with Rep. Owens and Rep. Gamba for fruitful discussions. The Chairs' expectation was that Reps. Levy and Hartman would meet with the livestock industry and the two groups would then convene for broader discussion to reach compromise. During our third meeting the legislators informed us that Reps Levy and Hartman had not met and that Rep. Levy would be bringing the same bill she introduced in previous sessions without any conversations. Frustratingly, this session, despite all of our efforts to engage in good faith, all discussions on amending SB 777 have intentionally excluded the conservation community.

SB 777 is bad public policy.

SB 777 is anti-science.

SB 985 is bad fiscal stewardship of limited public funds.

And this committee's process – by which the conservation community representing a large and every growing constituency of this committee was entirely shut out of negotiations– is bad

politics. Particularly so given the ever-increasing threats to wildlife and public lands from the federal government.

Once again, we ask that a work group be formed that includes discussion of reforms to the program to address issues with its transparency and accountability, as outlined in our previously submitted written testimony. This includes:

- Creation of a statewide livestock loss board with consistently applied criteria, and state-level system of payout of payments for confirmed or probable loss
- Provide trainings on the appropriate use of non-lethal coexistence tools funded by the program
- On-the-ground confirmation of the appropriate use of those tools at the appropriate time and place (including considerations of allotment size, geography, species, etc.) *and*
- Designing a program such that those producers who are successfully coexisting with wolves may still access support for non-lethal tools

Please vote no on this OCN major threat. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bethany Cotton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bethany Cotton, J.D.

Conservation Director

Cascadia Wildlands