

Dear Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice-Chair McDonald and Members Boice, Hartman, Levy, Marsh, McLain and Scharf,

I am in support of HB 2403. I raise sheep in Douglas County and have had numerous experiences with predators over the course of raising my flock. I do not own grazing ground so my sheep graze on various parcels of rented land around the county. I've had sheep at Glide, Dixonville, Garden Valley and Metz Hill.

For someone far removed from raising livestock, I imagine it is hard to understand what predation actually looks like. I would like to paint you a picture.

On an early morning in March of 2022, I walked into a field of ewes and young lambs to do a morning check. At a distance I could see there was a lamb laying in an unnatural position and I went to investigate. It was dead with two distinctive puncture holes behind its ears. As I looked around, I saw another lamb and another and another – four dead lambs in a straight line where a cougar had killed each one with one bite, left it and gone to the next. One lamb was missing – evidently, that one was to its liking and the cougar took it.



*1 Cougar bite marks that killed the lamb*

As I was gathering up the dead bodies, I realized that the last lamb wasn't actually dead. It still had a heart beat and was breathing. Frankly, I had no hope that it would live, but I took it to the barn and gave it a shot of antibiotics. It was still alive later that afternoon, so I committed to trying to get it to survive. Because of the muscle damage to its neck and front shoulders, it was unable to stand to nurse from its mother – so I had to train it to drink from a bottle and feed it three times daily. It is nearly impossible to get a lamb of that age to learn to drink from a bottle – they are too



*2 Lamb unable to stand due to cougar bite wounds*

used to mamma's nipples and don't like the fake ones. I also had to entice it to eat grain, which it had never eaten, in order for it to get high value nutrition to start the healing process. I did physical therapy with it every day to get it to stand. Because of the way a sheep's gut works, laying down all of the time can kill them. What does physical therapy for a lamb look like? It looks like me standing in a pen with a lamb's back hips held between my legs, bent over holding its front end up with my hand under its sternum rubbing circulation back into its front legs. Then holding the lamb's front legs braced while it holds its own weight. Then walking it a few feet each day. Then tens of feet each day until it can mostly walk on its own without falling on its face every other step.

I nursed the lamb back to health in the barn for about a month and was able to turn it back out with its mom and sister. But that was a challenge as well. Even though the sister was still nursing, the injured lamb couldn't go back to nursing off its mother. The mother didn't accept that this lamb was hers and wouldn't let it nurse. It walked funny and she barely tolerated having it near her in the field. The lamb was severely stunted and never did walk right.

Later that year, in September, I got a phone call from my landlord telling me that something had happened to my sheep. Five months after the cougar catastrophe, I walked into the same field to an even worse scene. There were two full grown ewes standing in the pond in shock – they were in full body shut down and barely functioning. There was one dead ewe that was partially eaten and several ripped up ewes scattered over about seven acres.



*3 Cougar bitten lamb and its twin sister. After one month of isolation and recovering it is severely stunted.*



*4 Ewe attacked and killed by domestic dogs.*

I waded into thigh deep water cautiously, not wanting to scare the sheep further into the water where they would drown. Their skin was ripped off them and hanging, their feet were stuck in the mud. I had to reach down and pull each foot out and try to push the ewes out, without causing more pain or damage to them. We moved them to the barn and continued around the field retrieving wounded animals. Some animals had their ears nearly ripped off, some had faces swollen and could hardly breath, all of them had patches of skin missing.

The last one, was my oldest and favorite ewe, Cedar. Out of the live animals, she was in the worst condition. From mid-way down her back the skin had been peeled off her and hung down her back legs. She was standing and we carefully loaded her in the bucket of the tractor and I rode, holding her, to the barn. My husband and I lifted her up from underneath to carry her into the barn, slinging her between us. When we let her down, she gave up trying to stand and collapsed on the ground.

I won't bore you with all the details of doctoring those animals back to health. Suffice it to say that it took months of dealing with nasty wounds, maggots, shots and topical ointments. In total there was one ewe killed outright, and eight attacked, but still alive. I cried when I put a .22 bullet in my favorite ewe's skull – she had survived three cougar attacks on my herd and a previous domestic dog attack.



*5 Head, neck and facial wounds from domestic dog attack.*



*7 Ewe attacked by domestic dogs that had to be put down because her injuries were too extensive to survive.*



*6 Ewes attacked by domestic dogs several months after the fact.*

The effects of the predatory attack didn't stop there. September is breeding season for my sheep and the ram was in with that group of ewes. The injured ewes were not able to breed that year, because they were healing from their wounds. Additionally, half of the un-injured ewes in that group didn't breed because of the stress from the attack. My 2023 lamb crop was dismal.

I had my suspicions about the cause of the September attack, but I wasn't certain. We loaded the original dead ewe in the pick-up and drove to Sutherlin. One of the previous predator control district employees for Douglas County had taken a job as a City of Sutherlin police officer, because of the uncertainty of funding for his job in predator control. Officer Dowdy was driving down a Sutherlin street in his patrol car and we flagged him down. When I asked him to look at the dead sheep and the photos of the others that I had on my phone, he put on a set of rubber gloves and gamely climbed in the bed of the pick-up to do an assessment. He determined that it was a domestic dog – without a doubt.

This is a vital skill that predator control district employees provide and a service that is critical for identifying what type of animal is preying on livestock. If a producer is to get reimbursed for the damage to their animals, they have to identify what type of predator did the damage. That identification usually has to come from someone official - like the employees of a predator control district. Having predator control districts makes it possible to have steady funding for these individuals, so that we can keep knowledgeable people in our areas.

If I were a producer solely concerned with costs and benefits, I would have left that fourth lamb to die the first morning after the cougar attack. I wouldn't have spent a month babying it along because ultimately, I never recouped the cost of that animal. There is a contradiction - a duality - to livestock producers than many people can't understand. Frankly, many of us don't really understand it ourselves. How do we raise animals for slaughter but care deeply for our animals at the same time? I don't know how. I just know I do. I am committed to raising my animals in the best possible way so that they have a good life. Effective predator control is part of that process.

People will argue that livestock infringe on the habitat of natural predators. In my case, there is a herd of thirty deer that the neighbors feed. The cougar had every opportunity to eat those. There was a nasty, month-old roadkill deer, ten feet outside the sheep field that the cougar was seen scavenging on two days after killing my lambs. There are photos of a pack of cougars – six cougars in one photo, traveling together – on a ranch just down the road from my sheep. It appears from the photos that it is a mother with her current year's kits as well as her adolescent kits from the previous year. That is not normal cougar behavior – far from it. There is plenty of prey for a healthy cougar population without them killing livestock for the pleasure of it.

Every livestock producer I know employs multiple types of non-lethal deterrents to predators: guardian animals, electric fence, bells, flashing lights, fladry, herders or penning animals at night. These are an integral part of life for ranchers. Lethal options need to be available to producers as well. HB 2403 provides a system for producers to pay for that service themselves, willingly. Producers need the ability to protect their livestock from predation. HB 2403 is vital to keeping animals healthy and safe. I urge you to support HB 2403.

Thank you for your careful attention to this bill.

Sarah Schartz

Sutherlin, OR