



House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water
900 Court Street NE Salem, Oregon

March 23, 2025

RE: Opposition to HB 2403, legislation to increase inhumane predator killing by USDA Wildlife Services

Dear Chairs Helm and Owens, Vice Chair Finger McDonald, and Members of the Committee:

HB 2403 would authorize unaccountable government districts to raise money for killing wildlife deemed a threat to private property, without any requirement to consider nonlethal alternatives. The undersigned organizations and individuals oppose this bill on grounds it would continue an outdated approach to human-wildlife conflict that focuses on killing wildlife instead of co-existence.

Background

HB 2403 would authorize special districts that collect money from landowners “for the purpose of funding county services to prevent, reduce and mitigate damage to property from predatory animals.” (Section 2(1)(a).) Targeted animals could include coyotes, cougars, bears, wolves, rabbits, beavers, and birds deemed destructive to agriculture. (Section 1(6).) A similar program was created in 2015 but sunset after 2021. Bills in 2021, 2022, and 2023 to continue the program did not pass.

Reasons to Oppose HB 2403

The money would go to a federal program known for cruel and unnecessary killing.

In practice, money raised by the districts would go, as it has in the past, to “Wildlife Services” – a highly controversial program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that carries out “predator control” on public and private lands with poisoning, trapping, snaring, aerial gunning, and paid hunters. (See [‘That’s a bloodbath’: How a federal program kills wildlife for private interests](#), NPR investigation (2024); [Exposed – USDA’s Secret War on Wildlife](#) (short documentary film); [The Rogue Agency](#), Harper’s Magazine (2016).) In 2023, the most recent year for which we have data, Wildlife Services killed 124,826 wild animals in Oregon, including 237 bears, 3,202 coyotes, 114 mountain lions, and 80 red foxes using methods including neck and leg snares, steel-jawed leghold traps, cage traps, and aerial gunning; and 55 coyote and red fox dens, where young pups are kept, were *gassed*.¹

Killing carnivores worsens conflicts with livestock.

Science increasingly shows that killing carnivores doesn’t reduce conflict, and in fact likely increases conflict by disrupting the natural territorial and competitive processes in carnivore social structures, causing more young, inexperienced animals to fill the landscape. Carnivores such as cougars, coyotes, and wolves have complex social structures, and resident older animals

defend their territory from dispersing animals. Study after study has shown that when resident animals are killed, it leaves a void on the landscape for younger dispersing animals who are more likely to seek easier prey such as livestock (please see [Effects of Human Hunting on Cougar and Human Conflicts](#), 17-minute video presentation by Dr. Robert Wielgus, leading carnivore researcher (2023); and [Killing Coyotes Is Not As Effective As Once Thought, Researchers Say](#), National Public Radio (2019).²

There would be no requirement to consider nonlethal alternatives.

HB 2403 includes language that would *permit* use of district funds for nonlethal measures. However, it would not *require* recipients of district funds to use or even consider such measures.³ Given Wildlife Service’s record for emphasizing killing of wildlife as its preferred solution to human-wildlife conflict (see references above), any state-created funding mechanism for the program should include requirements to consider and use nonlethal alternatives. Effective nonlethal methods include [livestock guardian animals](#), [Foxlights](#), [penning](#), [fladry](#), [range riding](#), and [livestock carcass disposal](#).

The districts would be unaccountable to the public.

HB 2403 includes a provision specifically designed to prevent the public from holding the special districts accountable. (Section 8.) Thus, even if HB 2403 had something in it to protect the public interest in wildlife (which it doesn’t), the bill would prevent enforcement of that.

Oregon needs a broader conversation on the role of government in “predator control.”

In addition to receiving money from “predator damage control districts,” “Wildlife Services” receives money from general fund appropriations to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Before resurrecting “predator control districts,” Oregon should take a hard look at how this money is spent, whether it results in excessive and unnecessary killing of wildlife, and whether public funding should be discontinued or at least have additional sideboards. One or more members of our coalition would welcome a chance to participate in a workgroup on these issues.

Signed,

Oregon Wildlife Coalition: Bird Alliance of Oregon, Cascadia Wildlands, Defenders of Wildlife, Humane Voters Oregon, Humane World for Animals, Oregon Wild, Think Wild, Western Environmental Law Center, and Willamette Riverkeeper.

Other signatories:

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Endnotes

¹ [Wildlife Services Program Data Reports 2023](#)

² [Scientific Opinion Letter](#), Yellowstone Ecological Research Center (2023). Elbroch et al, "Perspective: Why might removing carnivores maintain or increase risks for domestic animals?" *Biological Conservation*, Volume 283 (2023); Lambert et al., "Cougar Population Dynamics and Viability in the Pacific Northwest."; Peebles et al., "Effects of Remedial Sport Hunting on Cougar Complaints and Livestock Depredations." Teichman, Cristescu, and Darimont, "Hunting as a Management Tool? Cougar-Human Conflict Is Positively Related to Trophy Hunting." *J. A. Dellinger et al., "Temporal Trends and Drivers of Mountain Lion Depredation in California, USA " Human–Wildlife Interactions 15, no. 1 (2021). J. Polisar et al., "Jaguars, Pumas, Their Prey Base, and Cattle Ranching: Ecological Interpretations of a Management Problem," Biol Conserv 109 (2003); J. A. Shivik, A. Treves, and P. Callahan, "Nonlethal Techniques for Managing Predation: Primary and Secondary Repellents," Conservation Biology 17, no. 6 (2003); A. Treves and K. U. Karanth, "Special Section: Human-Carnivore Conflict: Local Solutions with Global Applications," *ibid.*; "Human-Carnivore Conflict and Perspectives on Carnivore Management Worldwide," *Conservation Biology 17, no. 6 (2003).**

³ Nonlethal measures include fencing, protective housing, electronic scare devices and guard dogs. For more information on nonlethal techniques, see this website for a Benton County program that emphasizes the use of these tools: [AWPP Annual Report \(2019\) - Benton County Public Works, Oregon](#)