

Subject: Testimony in opposition to HB 2403 (predator damage control districts)

Dear Co-Chairs Helm and Owns and Members of the House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water:

We are co-founders of the Benton County Agriculture and Wildlife Protection Program ([AWPP](#)). This is a county program which provides grant funds directly to farmers for the purchase of non-lethal wildlife deterrents to protect livestock. After seven years, the program has a nearly spotless record of protecting livestock from cougars, coyotes, and other predators throughout rural Benton County. The program has grown rapidly, with word of its effectiveness spreading from farm to farm in the central Coast Range (see map below).

We would like to make two points about Predator Control Districts.

Predator Control District fees are used exclusively to fund lethal predator control

Predator Control District fees are combined with county tax dollars and sent directly to USDA Wildlife Services to fund federal government trappers. District fees cannot fund the use of non-lethal wildlife deterrents because Wildlife Services does not “do” non-lethal predation management.

A 2009 Wildlife Services [directive](#) explains that the non-lethal “field activities” of a Wildlife Services trapper are “limited to technical assistance recommendations” and that non-lethal methods are to be “applied by the resource owner” (i.e. the farmer).

In Benton County we interviewed dozens of farmers and reviewed fifteen years of USDA activity summaries and verified that Wildlife Services did not provide livestock producers with any proactive non-lethal wildlife deterrents such as livestock guardian animals, protective housing, electrified fencing, or electronic scare devices.

Based on our experience in Benton County, the most effective use of taxpayer dollars for predation management is to invest in the purchase of non-lethal deterrents to prevent livestock losses (see [HB 2689](#)) rather than react to livestock losses by killing wildlife.

Predator Control Districts are predominately taxpayer funded yet have no established public record of effectiveness

According to a 2018 Capital Press [article](#), fees collected from farmers in the Douglas County Predator Control District accounted for only 44% of the cost of each government trapper. The majority of the cost, about 56%, was paid for by taxpayers through county tax revenue and state and federal government matching funds.

Since Predator Control Districts are predominately taxpayer funded, a public record of program effectiveness should be established before the program is made permanent.

Effectiveness reports should track, evaluate, and describe, at the level of individual (but anonymous) farms, methods used, their cost, and their effectiveness including amounts of

livestock loss, similar to [reports](#) produced by the Benton County non-lethal deterrents grant program.

In conclusion, rather than supporting a controversial and unaccountable federal government trapping program, I believe we should support cost-effective, non-lethal methods with a documented record of preventing conflicts with wildlife.

Respectfully,

Randy and Pam Comeleo

