



Date:	April 30, 2025
To:	Representative Ken Helm, Co-Chair Representative Mark Owens, Co-Chair Representative Sarah Finger McDonald, Vice Chair Members of the House Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water Committee
From:	Association of Oregon Counties Legislative Affairs Manager Branden Pursinger
Subject:	Senate Bill 777A – Support

The Association of Oregon Counties offers this letter in **support of Senate Bill 777A.**

In the early 2000s, Oregon’s Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) initiated development of a state Wolf Conservation and Management Plan – known simply as the Wolf Plan. They appointed a 14 member committee to oversee this work and over a three year period, the plan was drafted with input from a wide variety of stakeholders and the public. That plan was adopted by the ODFW Commission in 2005 with the purpose to “ensure the conservation of gray wolves as required by Oregon law while protecting the social and economic interests of all Oregonians.”

In the wolf plan, the ODFW Commission acknowledged the ranching and farming industries as important components to the overall state economy and as such wanted to find ways to address conflicts between wolves and livestock.

The Wildlife Policy (ORS 496.012) directs ODFW to manage wildlife populations at optimum levels and in a manner consistent with the primary uses of the lands and waters of the state. ORS 496.004 defines “optimum level” as “...wildlife population levels that provide self-sustaining species as well as taking, nonconsumptive, and recreational opportunities”. In addition, ORS 610.055 directs that appropriate measures must be taken to assist farmers, ranchers and others in resolving wildlife damage, and that federal, state, county and local government should cooperate in efforts to control wildlife damage. In the case of damage, wildlife is defined to mean fish, wild birds, amphibians, reptiles, feral swine (as defined by the Oregon Department of Agriculture) and other wild mammals (ORS 496.004). Combined, these policies mandate that the wolf Plan effectively address wolf-livestock conflict at a variety of scales, from industry-wide to individual producers.

In 2008 the first wolf pack was reestablished in Oregon and by 2010 there were 14 known wolves residing in Oregon. In response to these 14 known wolves in Oregon, the Legislature passed in 2011 by a unanimous vote in both chambers HB 3560. That bill directed Oregon’s Department of Agriculture to establish a wolf depredation compensation and financial assistance grant program. ORS 610.150 states, impacted ranchers are eligible for depredation compensation as long as their county has an established wolf committee. This committee is made up of 1 Commissioner, 2 livestock owners, 2 wolf conservationists, and 2 members of the business committee. Statute also states funds will also be made

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available to assist counties in compensating individuals who suffer “loss, injury, or missing livestock due to wolf depredation.” Finally, financial assistance is allocated to the county to people who implement livestock management or nonlethal wolf control techniques. These techniques could include but are not limited to range riders, spotlighting, pasture monitoring, air cannons, drones, and carcass removal. Of the grant money requested, statute requires a minimum of 30% is required to be put towards these nonlethal measures.

2012 was the first year this program was up and running. 8 counties were eligible for the funding and although all 8 received funds for nonlethal measures, 1 county was awarded funds to compensate for livestock death, injury or missing as a result. In 2024, 10 counties were awarded funds to compensate ranchers for death, injury or missing livestock as a result of wolves and 13 requested and received funds for livestock management or nonlethal actions.

Today, 18 of Oregon’s 36 counties have a wolf depredation committee and are eligible for grants to reimburse the rancher as well as local nonlethal deterrence measures.

AOC is in support of SB 777A.

First, it removes the missing category from what is eligible. Missing livestock could occur for a variety of reasons and we believe, as it is sometimes difficult for the rancher to provide the necessary documentation to show the missing was due to wolves in the area, this removal makes sense. Furthermore, removing the missing livestock helps provide additional certainty to those that might question the programs validity.

Second, this program has been operational for over a decade and counties have heard some ranchers do not wish to participate as they do not believe they will be adequately reimbursed for their loss. For example, one Eastern Oregon County that has a high population of ranchers and cattle, only 6% of all those that could be in the program are. One southern Oregon county sees about 10% of their ranchers participate. The multiplier that is attached to this bill will help compensate the ranchers for their loss while broadening the appeal to participate. This will also ensure more wolf deterrents are on the landscape to reduce livestock / wolf interactions. The multiplier is set by the county committee with a maximum allowable set in the bill. As a reminder, these county committees are made up of an equal number of ranchers and conservationists, and ODFW has to sign off saying the depredation occurred because of a wolf before anyone is compensated for their loss.

Third, to show continued commitment to the partnership the counties have with ODFW, ODA, the Wolf Plan, and conservation efforts to ensure coexistence. Counties are in support of the final piece of this bill which increases the 30% amount that is required to go to nonlethal deterrents to 50%. Half of all requested funds must be put toward nonlethal deterrents which include but again are not limited to: range riders, spotlighting, pasture monitoring, air cannons, drones, carcass removal, etc.

Lethal take is only an option in very specific circumstances which ODFW has laid out in administrative rule (OAR 635-110-0030).

In order for a rancher to be compensated through the wolf depredation grant program, they must be in a county that has an established wolf committee, they must have deterrence on the landscape and they must have a confirmed or probable designation that has been identified by ODFW biologists.

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As wolf populations continue to grow over time, there will inevitably be more livestock depredations. The Wolf Plan is integral to having wolves on the landscape and just as integral to that plan, is the county compensation program. To uphold the counties portion of the State's Wolf Plan, we need to broaden the appeal and desire to participate. AOC believes SB 777A will do just that.

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