

Chair Jama, Vice-Chair Bonham, and members of the committee.

House Bill 2977, a measure that represents not just a smart investment in Oregon's natural legacy—but also a tangible lifeline to rural communities like mine.

While HB 2977 makes a bold and historic commitment to recovering Oregon's fish, wildlife, and habitats, I want to focus specifically on the 0.05% allocation—approximately \$3 million per biennium—dedicated to the Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance Grant Program. This provision directly benefits Oregon's producers, especially in rural Eastern Oregon, where coexistence with wolves isn't theoretical—it's daily life.

As someone who has worked on wolf policy for nearly two decades, I've seen firsthand the impact wolf depredation has on ranchers and livestock operations. These are families who raise cattle, sheep, and goats—often on the very lands that serve as wildlife corridors and habitats. They understand conservation. They practice stewardship. But when confirmed wolf kills occur, the economic and emotional toll can be devastating.

HB 2977 provides more than just compensation—it provides trust, stability, and a sense that the state values the contributions and sacrifices of the people who live and work in wolf territory. The funding will also support prevention strategies like range riders, fencing, and the employment of an Assistant Wolf Biologist. This is proactive, balanced wildlife policy.

The “1% for Wildlife” model this bill uses is a fair and effective funding mechanism. By increasing Oregon's transient lodging tax from 1.5% to 2.75%, HB 2977 creates a dedicated, sustainable revenue stream that invests in the State Wildlife Action Plan, which currently identifies over 300 species of greatest conservation need—an increase of 70 since 2015. With roughly 65% of lodging taxes paid by visitors from outside Oregon, this is a modest and equitable way to fund vital conservation work without placing the burden on everyday Oregonians.

Let's also be clear: this bill keeps Oregon competitive. Even with the increase, we remain among the lowest state lodging tax rates in the country, and the returns are significant—not only in species and habitat recovery, but in the strength and sustainability of our \$15.6 billion outdoor recreation economy, which includes \$1.2 billion from hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching.

For my district and many others across Oregon, this bill is about balance. **It's about protecting wildlife and protecting the people who live closest to it.** It's about making sure we don't pit ecological recovery against economic survival, but instead bring both together in a way that supports rural livelihoods and conservation goals alike.

I urge your support for HB 2977 and thank the sponsors for including critical support for the wolf depredation program—an essential tool for rural Oregon's resilience and Oregon's broader wildlife legacy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bobby Levy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Bobby" being more prominent than the last name "Levy".

Bobby Levy, Oregon House District 58