



OREGON WILD

Public Testimony of Oregon Wild
House Agriculture & Natural Resource Committee
House Bill: 4158
February 9, 2012

My name is Rob Klavins, I am the Wildlands & Wildlife Advocate for Oregon Wild and currently live in Portland.

Oregon Wild is a statewide conservation group with over 12,000 members and supporters who support our mission to protect our states wildlands, wildlife, and waters as an enduring legacy for future generations. As part of that mission we advocate for healthy populations of all native wildlife from elk and salmon to wolves and meadowlarks.

We believe there is room in Oregon for both native wildlife and people. The extermination of native wildlife, from many of our wild salmon and steelhead runs to gray wolves, will forever be a black mark on our state's soul. But the recovery of the wolf has the potential to be our states greatest conservation success story.

To back up that belief, Oregon Wild and our members have provided funds for non-lethal efforts to help the livestock industry readjust to living with wolves on the landscape. We work with people from Joseph to Brookings who welcome the return of wolves for their ecological, economic, and symbolic value. We have promoted efforts to increase sustainable wildlife-based tourism that has generated positive attention and economic opportunities to communities near Oregon's wolf country. To help tell the story of Oregon's wolf recovery, participants in our annual Wolf Rendezvous meet ranchers, scientists, wildlife managers, hunters, business owners, and others.

Given that wolves continue to be at the center of a campaign of exaggeration, fear, and purposeful misinformation, we also work to demonstrate the positive effects of wolves that get so little attention when there are always others more interested in perpetuating unnecessary conflict and controversy.

Even so, this marks the third year in a row that wolf kill bills have been introduced in this committee. Last year we testified on what some called the Little Red Riding Hood and Three Little Pigs bills which were amongst the half dozen pieces of legislation aimed at killing Oregon's endangered gray wolves and undermining the state's wolf plan.

This year it's the Chicken Little bill.

HB4158 is a hysterical piece of legislation. It argues that Oregon's 29 endangered wolves constitute a state of emergency. Rhetoric coming from Oregon's anti-wolf activists has already drawn ridicule and negative attention to the state and given responsible communities a black eye. Now they think you should interrupt the important work of the legislature during a budget crisis to declare an emergency, undermine basic environmental laws, and fast track the killing of an endangered species.

Oregon Wild knows a thing or two about the wolf plan. We participated in the process that created it. For half a decade we advocated for its full funding and implementation. We spent the last 7 years defending it against attacks from the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and others intent on killing wolves. During the 2010 wolf plan review we stood with Oregonians who submitted over 20,000 public comments – over 90% in favor of stronger protections for wolves. We were here last year when at least half a dozen bills proposed to make it easier to kill wolves and undermine the plan.

The wolf plan we supported allowed for killing wolves as an option of last resort. Unfortunately though we supported a plan that represented a social and political compromise, we came to discover we never had a partner in that compromise. Rather than work collaboratively with Oregonians who overwhelmingly support wolf recovery and value native wildlife, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association wrote the minority report and hired lobbyists to convince you to kill wolves and undermine wildlife conservation. Instead of working to reduce conflict they hired a Pearl District PR firm to soften their image. Their representatives were recently quoted in an out of state newspaper arguing non-lethal prevention doesn't work, and the only reason to make a token effort is to get the state to move on to shooting endangered wolves.

Last year, Oregon Wild and other groups were forced to go to court because pressure from livestock interests had de-railed the Oregon Wolf Plan. Instead of focusing on good science, conservation, and education, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife was under near constant attack from anti-wildlife groups who demanded that wolves be shot every time a cow went missing. Instead of working to prevent conflict, they were forced to spend their time rubber-stamping kill permits. And now those same anti-wildlife voices want the legislature to intervene, so that they can have a blank check instead of a rubber stamp.

It is important put the anti-wolf and anti-wildlife rhetoric you are hearing today into perspective. Oregon is home to 1.3 million cows and less than 30 wolves. More than 50,000 cows were lost in 2010 due to weather, disease, human thieves, and domestic dogs before they made it to the slaughterhouse. In the following three years, less than three dozen have been killed by wolves.

To the extent wolves create hardship for a small number of livestock managers, the public has bent over backwards to address it. Last year, the legislature created a taxpayer-funded compensation bill to pay for any losses. Taxpayers and conservation groups have also footed the bill for non-lethal measures to reduce conflict. Another bill being considered would add additional tax breaks for livestock owners in wolf country.

Most Oregonians believe that living near the big wild places of the west is a privilege and a blessing. They also understand that coexisting with native wildlife is not an onerous burden, but a responsibility shared by all. It is time for extreme anti-wildlife voices to put down the rifle and pick up the check. It's time to stop creating conflict and make a real effort to work with conservationists, state agencies, and others to coexist with wolves and other native species. And it's time for this committee to stop rewarding bad behavior.

Oregon is facing more than enough real emergencies. We don't need anti-wildlife groups manufacturing new ones.

This reckless legislation is dramatically out of step with the values of most Oregonians. At a time when the world is still celebrating the success story of Journey – Oregon's most famous wolf – and his thousand mile odyssey in search of a mate, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association is asking the legislature to declare a set of emergency to make it easier to kill wolves. Had they had their way last session, Journey and his home pack would have been killed before his wanderings ever began.

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**Audubon Society of Portland ~ Big Wildlife ~ Cascadia Wildlands ~ Center for Biological Diversity
Gifford Pinchot Task Force ~ Hells Canyon Preservation Council ~ KS Wild
Lane County Audubon Society ~ National Wolfwatcher Coalition ~ Natural Resources Defense Council
Northeast Oregon Ecosystems ~ Northern Idaho Wolf Alliance ~ Northwest Environmental Advocates
Oregon Natural Desert Association ~ Oregon Wild ~ Predator Defense
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council ~ Western Environmental Law Center
Western Wildlife Conservancy ~ Wolf Education & Research Center ~ Wolf Recovery Foundation**

February 3, 2012

Governor John Kitzhaber
160 State Capital
900 Court Street
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047

Governor Kitzhaber,

On behalf of our 21 organizations and thousands of members throughout Oregon, we write to urge you to strongly and clearly oppose any legislation that would circumvent the state Endangered Species Act, or weaken other safeguards for fish and wildlife in the upcoming session.

Oregonians treasure our state's native wildlife, and strongly support the protection of endangered species. With the state facing a major budget crisis and a myriad of other serious problems, it is inappropriate to use a short legislative session to rush through such controversial measures.

This is particularly true of HB 4158, a measure that would declare a state "emergency" over Oregon's fragile recovering population of 29 endangered gray wolves in order to circumvent the state Endangered Species Act and allow the animals to be shot.

Legislatively carving out exemptions to allow the state to kill endangered species at the request of special interests opposed to fish and wildlife conservation would set a dangerous precedent that concerns us all. Such legislation could open a Pandora's box of copy-cat measures to exempt other state endangered species from the legal protections in order to satisfy demands from logging, mining, grazing, or development interests.

Governor Kitzhaber, time and time again, Oregonians have spoken out in favor of the conservation and protection of fish and wildlife in our state. We urge you again to strongly oppose anti-wildlife legislation in the upcoming session and focus instead on positive collaborative solutions that ensure healthy abundant populations of native fish and wildlife for future generations.

Very sincerely,



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Cc: State Legislative Leaders