

Oregon Hunters Association

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May 22, 2013

Testimony In Support of HB 2624A

Chair Dingfelder and Members of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, for the record I am Al Elkins representing the Oregon Hunters Association. The mission of OHA is to "provide an abundant huntable wildlife resource in Oregon for present and future generations, enhancement of wildlife habitat and protection of hunter's rights." Last year alone OHA put over \$178,000 of its own money into wildlife and habitat enhancement projects in Oregon.

Protecting huntable wildlife for future generations is why OHA is here today in support of HB 2624A. In my testimony I would like to address the wildlife management issues that this bill addresses and how it addresses these issues.

What Wildlife Management Issues Does This Bill Address?

You have heard testimony today in support of the bill based on research and science. In essence the science and research have told us that:

- Currently Oregon has a wildlife management problem.
- Biologists report that cougar numbers have tripled to 6,000 in the past 15 years and that cougar complaints have increased exponentially.
- Oregon's burgeoning cougar population has resulted in dramatic increases in these three key problem areas:
 - Public safety concerns (cougars roaming parks, neighborhoods and schoolyards and showing no fear of humans)
 - Depredation on domestic animals, both livestock and pets
 - Declining numbers of deer and elk (cougar predation on fawns and calves are the main component*) and corresponding loss of participation in hunting due to fewer tags being issued, which results in loss of revenue for the state and income for businesses that depend on hunting.

(* A recent Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife pilot program in the Heppner Unit demonstrated a dramatic increase in elk calf survival when cougar numbers were reduced in the area).

What Does This Bill Do?

This bill helps give a county the opportunity to use a tool to help with wildlife management issues to address the concerns listed above. This bill does this by simply saying that a county is exempt from the statute banning the use of dogs to hunt cougars if voters approve a county measure proposed by initiative petition or referred to the people by the governing body of the county. So this bill gives the residents of the county the right to vote on whether they want to use a tool that will afford them good wildlife

management practices and address the issues of public safety, depredation on domestic animals (both livestock and pets), and the declining numbers of deer and elk.

This bill does not take away the authority of ODFW to control wildlife management within the county. As a matter of fact there is language in the bill that guarantees that ODFW is still in control of wildlife management. Subsections 2 and 3 of the bill read:

“(2) A county that is exempt from the applicability of the provisions of ORS 498.164 related to cougars pursuant to subsection (1) of this section shall notify the State

Department of Fish and Wildlife.

(3) The exemption of a county under this section does not affect the authority of the State Fish and Wildlife Commission to manage cougars in the county under any other provision of the wildlife laws.

In other words if the county chooses to use hunting cougars with dogs as a management tool, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission is still in charge of managing the wildlife within the county.

In conclusion the Oregon Hunters Association urges the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources to support this bill and move it to the floor of the Senate. The bill is an essential tool in helping provide future generations huntable wildlife for years to come.

That concludes my testimony. I will be glad to answer any questions.