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To the Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources:

Oregon's wildlife is being poached at an alarming rate with much of the demand for parts from these poached animals coming from Asian countries where items such as bear gallbladder, bear paws, cougar bones and cougar sex organs are used as traditional medicines and as aphrodisiacs. Similarly, sturgeon roe and wild salmon supply other illegal black markets. The lucrative nature of this illegal animal part's market leaves none of Oregon's forests and waters immune from the despicable poachers who kill indiscriminately and without apparent concern for any legal consequences. That must change. This legislature should proclaim loudly enough, so that all poachers take warning, that their actions will not be tolerated in Oregon, that with the passage of this bill we as citizens of Oregon make it clear that if you poach our wildlife you will be dealt with strictly and the consequences will reach far into the poacher's pocket for restitution and will deprive the poacher of freedom through a long period of incarceration where warranted.

The headlines are everywhere: Police Cracking Down on Exotic Animal Smuggling; 2 Accused of Illegally Selling Caviar, Steelhead Salmon; Three Suspected in Big Deer Poaching Case, to name a few recent examples. In one case a man was arrested trying to buy forty bear gallbladders which would have been shipped to Asia and sold for a significant profit had it not been a police sting operation. But while it was a sting, it was also indicative of what is going on in our forests every day. Poachers are taking our wildlife without regard for the law and it is time now for them to regard the law as a force that will fine them in amounts that are feared and, in some circumstances, deprive them of their liberty when they are caught.

WildAid has been successful in changing the hearts and minds of millions of people in China, Viet Nam and elsewhere convincing those people to abandon the illegal parts market with an understanding that poachers supply those markets and that wildlife are suffering throughout the world to fill the demand. Unfortunately, there are still millions more people who continue to consume these animal parts. Until the demand ceases completely, bears, cougars, sturgeon, trout and many other species are seen by the poachers as nothing more than a paycheck. We need to show the poachers that those same animals are also a non-stop ticket to court where big fines and jail time await.

When Oregon passed the shark fin ban in 2011, we were followed closely by California which passed a similar ban and then, amazingly, by the central committee in Beijing which banned all shark fin soup from official functions. It was, and is, a great victory in changing the hearts and minds of those people who have traditionally consumed shark fin soup. Now we need to send a similar message to those poachers who help fill the illegal parts market and say if you are caught poaching in Oregon you will be severely punished. The choice is up to them. Our job is to make that an easy choice. Thank you.