



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES**

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 2537

**Presented to House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
By Scott Beckstead, Oregon Senior State and Western Regional Director
The Humane Society of the United States
February 5, 2015**

On behalf of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the nation's largest animal protection organization, and our supporters in Oregon, I thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2537, relative to the illegal taking and killing of wildlife.

Sponsored by Rep. Witt, HB 2537 addresses a serious problem in Oregon: wildlife poaching and the illegal trade in wildlife.

“Poaching” is the illegal harming or killing of wildlife, and involves using illegal weapons and illegal hunting methods, killing endangered species, illegal trafficking in wildlife, and trespassing on private land to hunt. The number of animals poached annually in the U.S. is estimated to reach into the tens of millions.

Poaching is an enormous problem in Oregon. In 2010, a five-year study by state biologists found that poaching is partly responsible for the drop in mule deer populations in Oregon from historic peaks of 300,000 animals down to 216,000 and well below the Department of Fish and Wildlife's target of 347,400. According to the Department, the study revealed that the number of mule deer taken illegally nearly equaled the amount taken legally. In 2014, an Oregon couple operating an illegal hunting guide operation was convicted in one of the largest poaching rings in state history. Twenty-three others were arrested in the case on more than 200 counts of illegal hunting. In January, Oregon State Police cited two men in a poaching case involving a bull elk and four buck deer. Only the heads were taken—a common occurrence in Oregon.

The illegal wildlife trade is one of the world's largest black markets involving an estimated \$10 billion to \$20 billion per year. Live animals such as turtles are illegally taken and sold as pets. In Oregon and elsewhere, animals may also be illegally killed and their parts—such as bear gall bladders, elk antlers, or Sturgeon eggs—traded and used for purported medicinal purposes, souvenirs, or traditional delicacies.

Wildlife trafficking can have devastating consequences for wild animals, conservation efforts and local communities. Methods used to capture, transport and kill animals can cause tremendous suffering. The trade often involves unsustainable practices, damaging ecosystems and threatening the survival of some species who may already face habitat destruction or other threats. Wildlife tourism and other legal uses of natural resources are also negatively impacted.

Those involved in the wildlife trade are among the most egregious types of poachers. They are often involved in other types of crime and can operate highly sophisticated, large-scale operations. Many perceive the illicit trade to be low risk and high reward. With inadequate penalties and wildlife parts sometimes bringing in thousands of dollars, the consequences of being caught are just the cost of doing business. Additionally, only

one to five percent of poachers are ever apprehended. Many cases rely on an eyewitness, and while officers work tirelessly to protect our wildlife, they often have limited resources and countless acres of habitat to patrol.

Poachers callously disregard wildlife protection laws and undermine the challenging work of law enforcement. They steal from lawful hunters and wildlife watchers alike and threaten public safety and the welfare and conservation of native species important to our ecosystem.

The key to combatting poaching is deterring these crimes before they occur. Strong penalties are needed to outweigh the economic benefits of poaching and to address those who wantonly and repeatedly violate the law. For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB 2537 to help our wildlife law enforcement officers deter poaching and bring wildlife violators to justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.