

TO:

Members of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

FROM:

Louise Kane, JD

April 13st, 2015

RE: HB3515

*Members of the Agriculture & Natural Resources Committee:
Please kill this bill.*

BILL SUMMARY:

This bill silences the majority voice of Oregonians who wish to maintain full protections for Oregon's wolves until a healthy, genetically viable and self-sustaining population of this keystone species is well-established in our state.

HB3515 removes wolf management from the biologists and managers working under the ODFW and leaves wolf management, forever, to special interests and politicians who hate wolves. The bill is an audacious example of the loudest and most irrational voices attempting to hijack wildlife policy. Any bill that attempts to eliminate state or national ESA protections for a single species must be immediately suspect and rejected.

This bill undoes years of collaborative work, which has produced the nationally lauded Oregon Wolf Plan, setting a national standard for enlightened, scientifically rational wolf management.

There is great debate about wolves and their recovery, yet it is hard to deny that the greatest impediment to recovery for wolves is resistance to their presence and ingrained intolerance by some special interest groups.

When departing director of Washington Fish and Game (WDFG) Phil Anderson exited his position in early 2015, Anderson reflected on his biggest disappointment, “we’re not in a better place with wolves in terms of a social tolerance aspect.”¹ While speaking to the WA state constituency, Anderson might well have been speaking of the relentless battles to delist wolves waged by many western politicians and powerful lobbies that are almost universally intolerant of wolves.

Yet in the national arena and the Pacific coastal areas, wolves and wolf recovery is not only tolerated, but also celebrated. To provide just one example, The USFWS under political duress, proposed to delist wolves

nationally and return them to state management. The Service solicited some 100,000,000 comments in late 2014 on removing federal protections from wolves ⁱⁱ. The public sent a resounding message to abort a national delisting and continue federal protections for wolves.

Time and again, when given the chance ordinary citizens support continued protections for wolves and support protecting the integrity of the provisions of the national and state Endangered Species Acts. They do so with good reason. Since delisting, wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains and Great Lakes have been under siege. Some 2209 wolves have been slaughtered under Montana, Idaho and Wyoming state “management” plans since losing federal protections ⁱⁱⁱ. This does not include the numbers of wolves that were killed by the Wildlife Services such as those in the Frank Church Wilderness Areas, far from any potential threats to humans or livestock. The number of wolves killed exceeded the total population estimates of wolves for that region before federal protections were removed. Wolves in the Great Lakes have not fared much better.

To date only 77 confirmed wolves occupy Oregon's 97,000 square miles, with only seven wolves known outside of NE Oregon. This is far from a recovered population. The bill that is before you is just one reason to believe that if passed, the same industries will push for similar wolf eradication policies.

In the nearly forty years since the drafting of the ESA significant scientific advancements should be defining a new path for recovery for species like wolves. By now we fully appreciate the role of large carnivores in their habitats ^{iv} Instead, the passing of close to three centuries has not created a more tolerant political and special interest response to the presence of a species as iconic and ecologically important as the Grey Wolf. Unfortunately, as Anderson lamented on leaving his position, much of the arrogant intolerance for predators, and especially wolves, continues. But the intolerance is irrational. The policies that derived from 18th and 19th century prejudices are as much alive today as they were when the last wolves in the continental US were killed in the 1930s.

Wolves are a symbol of wildness. They are unique in many ways from their sociality and devotion to one another, to their heritage as the forefathers of our dogs, to their resiliency in the most hostile environments and their ability to survive. They are truly a “charismatic species”, they inspire strong state and national popular support and they are vital to healthy ecosystems.

Oregon is at a crossroad, you can use the wisdom of your scientists and public to guide your wolf policy or succumb to politics that subvert democratic traditions, place a barely recovering species back at risk, and end the ability to ever protect wolves under the state ESA. That is just bad policy, bad science and bad for Oregonians.

Oregon is a state distinguished for reverence and protection of its natural heritage including diverse wildlife. This Bill betrays the environmental values cherished by the vast majority of Oregon voters.

ⁱ <http://nwsportsmanmag.com/editors-blog/exit-interview-anderson-leaving-wdfw/>

ⁱⁱ In the latest solicitation for comments by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) over 1,000,000 comments were received with over 90% against a national delisting.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/public/hunt/?getPage=121>;
<http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/planahunt/huntingGuides/wolf/default.html>;
<http://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/HUNTING-1000743.aspx>

^{iv} There is a wealth of data on the benefits of predators to ecosystems (see Science, 2011, 333: 301-306).