



January 28, 2016

Senator Chris Edwards
900 Court Street, NE, S-411
Salem, OR 97301

Representative Brad Witt
900 Court Street NE, H-374
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chairs Edwards and Witt,

I am writing to follow up on the January 14 hearing before the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee pertaining to wolves and express our opposition to HB4040 and SB1557.

I appreciated the opportunity to present our perspective on wildlife policy and wolf recovery. I also appreciated the committee's desire, exemplified by Chair Witt, to ensure decisions are made with science and sustainability in mind. Considering this desire to base decisions on solid information, it is essential to clear up some inaccurate information that was presented and went unchallenged on Jan. 14.

Certainly, we recognize that some legitimate concerns were raised by bill proponents that are worthy of further discussion. However, HB4040 and SB1557 do nothing to address them. The bills are unnecessary, controversial, and potentially harmful to wildlife conservation and public policy.

- A plain reading of the wolf plan states at least six times that wolves “may be *considered*” for delisting upon sustaining four breeding pairs for three consecutive years. It does not trigger automatic delisting, as was suggested multiple times.
- We participated in the listing review process in good faith and urged ODFW to follow the law informed by the best available science and Oregon's conservation values.
- The law requires an independent review of ODFW's decision to delist wolves. In addition to ignoring that and other legal requirements, the agency ignored comprehensive critiques from world-renowned scientists. One prime example:
 - *“It is my expert opinion that the existing [analysis] is fundamentally flawed and does not provide an adequate or realistic assessment of the Oregon wolf population to meet Criterion 1 or 2 or 4, therefore the delisting requirements are not supported by the results of the [analysis] as it was performed.”*
- Derek E. Lee, Principal Scientist, Wild Nature Institute, Hanover, N.H.
- Conservation organizations, including Oregon Wild, have asked for a legal review of wolf delisting. We have not asked for an injunction. Wolves are currently delisted. Legislation is not needed to make it so. Rep. Gorsek asked Sen. Hansell and Rep. Baretto if their legislation was intended to preempt a review by the courts. They answered “no.” However, HB4040 and SB1557, if passed, would indeed circumvent the legal review process.

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- In 2013, the legislature ratified an agreement between the livestock industry, conservationists, and ODFW. Subsequently, actions taken by ODFW to address chronic livestock depredation that are consistent with the wolf plan are not subject to the state ESA regardless of the status of wolves. Put differently, ODFW can continue to address wolf-livestock conflict without the proposed legislation.
- Legislation to pile on to ODFW's decision would be precedent-setting and controversial. It would sidestep the public's right to hold public agencies accountable to their own laws and defy the wishes of the vast majority of Oregonians (96% of over 10,000 public comments received on delisting were in favor of maintaining the listed status of wolves).
- HB 4040 goes further by undermining ODFW's discretion and authority to relist wolves as well as undermining the Wolf Plan itself which provides criteria under which wolves may be re-listed.
- Neither bill honors the request of the ODFW Commission for the legislature to address wolf-poaching.

We also heard loud and clear a request for submitting science on issues related to wolves specifically and wildlife more broadly. We will honor that request. Far too often decisions of wildlife management are made based on anecdote, fear, and mythology rather than scientific consensus and conservation values. That's especially true when it comes to native carnivores. Given that Oregon has produced some of the world's foremost experts on the topic (Bob Beschta, Cristina Eisenberg, Bill Ripple, and others) we would encourage these committees and others to consider discussions of such science while not under the pressures of imminent legislation and with credible, unbiased scientific experts.

While wolf recovery and wildlife issues can be controversial subjects, there is a great deal of potential for finding common ground and achieving solutions that work for all parties – including wildlife. We hope we can look forward to those conversations in the future. HB4040 and SB1557 do not advance that cause.

Sincerely,



Sean Stevens
Executive Director, Oregon Wild

Cc: House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
House Committee on Energy and Environment
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
Governor Kate Brown