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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

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February 16, 2016

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources
900 Court Street N.E.
Room 347
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chairman Edwards and Members of the Committee,

I understand you are considering legislation, HB 4040, that would ratify the extremely misguided decision by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to remove the gray wolf from the state Endangered Species Act. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (Department) recommendation to delist the gray wolf was premature and not supported by the best available science. I urged the Commission to reject the Department's recommendation and was shocked when they voted to delist the wolf in November. I immediately called on the Governor and Oregon legislature to reverse this outrageous decision.

Instead, the Oregon House is moving forward with legislation that would ratify the Commission's action to delist the wolf in order to preempt judicial review of the flawed decision. I find this to be an extraordinary abuse of power and I urge you to reject HB 4040 and any other legislation that would undermine wolf recovery.

Through my extensive experience with federal wolf delisting efforts, I know it is critically important that wildlife management, especially management of an iconic predator species like the gray wolf, is based upon sound scientific findings and analysis. The fact that the Department decided not to conduct an external, independent peer-review panel as required by state law is both alarming and telling, especially since the pending federal proposal to delist the gray wolf has been mired in controversy over both the science used to justify the delisting as well as improper influence by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on the independent peer-review panel.

Oregon should take a cautious, scientifically informed approach and avoid grave risks to species recovery. While I am encouraged by the hard work the Department put into the wolf status review, the Department moved forward with a proposal that is not scientifically defensible and is inconsistent with Oregon's Endangered Species Act.

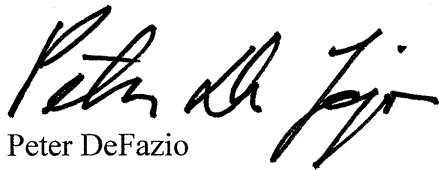
Wolves have just begun to recover in Oregon and still only inhabit small portions of their historical range. Despite some of the successes we have had in Oregon, wolf recovery is still at a very fragile, early stage. Wolves have just moved out of the first recovery phase in the state's

eastern recovery zone, and have populated just 11 percent of suitable habitat in the state. Population numbers are simply not high enough and distribution not wide enough to warrant a state delisting.

Caution needs to be exercised and delisting could signal to some that it is "open season" on wolves. The experiences of other states such as Idaho and Wyoming provide evidence of this. It is critical we avoid any increase in wolf mortality during this early recovery period. We cannot simply hunt wolves back down to their lowest sustainable population levels. This should not be tolerable in Oregon.

The extensive non-lethal efforts and stakeholder outreach by the state have made Oregon the model for wolf conservation in the nation. Ratifying the delisting decision will signal a sharp departure from these efforts that have made wolf recovery a success so far in our state. Instead, the committee should reverse the Commission's decision and demand an external scientific peer review of the Department's proposal to delist the wolf to ensure its recommendation is legally and scientifically sound. I urge you to reject this legislation that would harm wolf recovery efforts in Oregon. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter DeFazio". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with some loops and flourishes.

Peter DeFazio