



February 7, 2018

RE: Oregon Conservation Network Opposition to HB 4106

Dear Chair Clem and Committee Members:

My name is Paige Spence, and I am the Director of the Oregon Conservation Network. The Oregon Conservation Network is coordinated through the Oregon League of Conservation Voters and is a coalition of nearly 40 not-for-profit organizations united to advocate for pro-conservation legislation and fighting policies that threaten our state's natural legacy. I am here today representing the voices of coalition members Oregon Wild, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, and Cascadia Wildlands.

We strongly oppose HB 4106.

Predation Rates Have Not Increased Alongside Oregon's Increased Wolf Population

There is an assumption by non-experts that as the wolf population increases it is correlated with more predations on livestock, but this is not what the science shows. This bill would solidify a falsehood. HB 4106 seeks to tie the amount of funds available for compensation to the rate of growth of the wolf population. However, existing science does not conclude that the more wolves there are, the more wolf-predations on livestock there will be.

Oregon's own experience demonstrates that livestock predation is not correlated to the wolf population. If anything, reduced livestock predation in Oregon is correlated to enforceable requirements for non-lethal management and a higher bar for killing wolves. We saw this from 2013 to 2015: During this period the wolf population doubled and tripled but wolf predation events declined.

Currently, Oregon's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan is in the process of being updated. At this stage, all stakeholders are opposed to the revisions to the Wolf Plan which have been proposed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).

Multiple wolf-related issues will be part of the discussions and negotiations, and the wolf compensation program is one of them. Note that the compensation program was called for in the Wolf Plan, and that the law creating compensation came from negotiations between the ODFW, conservationists, and the livestock industry. It is thus much more appropriate for this topic to be part of the facilitated multi-stakeholder discussion on the Wolf Plan.

It is unwise timing and counterproductive to the impending stakeholder discussions for any legislation to take place at this time pertaining to any of the Wolf Plan provisions under discussion. If stakeholders can again come to agreement, the legislature should ratify that rather than go it alone.

The Compensation Program Should Not Receive Additional Funding Due to Ongoing Problems

Oregon's wolf compensation program has been the subject of investigative reporting demonstrating a program rife with abuse and in substantial need of reform. In 2017, an exposé by Oregon Public Broadcasting revealed, among other things, inordinately large payments to counties with few wolves, insufficient documentation to verify that livestock for which compensation was given were in fact lost due to wolves and a scattershot approach between the county committees administering the compensation fund payments in their respective counties. HB 4106 seeks to make the compensation fund a permanent entitlement and expand the funds available without taking a single step towards reforming the program's abuses. The compensation fund is financed by taxpayers, who deserve assurance their money is being spent responsibly.

Sincerely,

Paige Spence
Oregon Conservation Director
Oregon League of Conservation Voters