



February 6, 2019

Joint Ways & Means, Natural Resources Subcommittee
Co-Chairs Senator Kathleen Taylor and Representative Jeff Reardon

Re: HB 5002, Oregon Department of Agriculture's Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 5002, the Department of Agriculture Budget for the 2019-21 biennium.

The Association of Oregon Counties represents all 36 Oregon counties. We have a saying at AOC that "Once you've seen one Oregon county, you've seen one Oregon County."

Many of our counties, especially rural counties, have economies and social values that are based on natural resources. Agriculture is an important component. The jobs and products that Oregon's farmers, ranchers and processors create contribute significantly to economic and social stability in many of Oregon's counties.

Tourism is also an important part of rural economies. Providing a safe, broad-based array of recreational opportunities helps to strengthen the social and economic fabric of Oregon.

AOC advocates to restore funding to APHIS Wildlife Services. Restoring the funding (\$481,840) will leverage additional funding that individual counties put on the table to provide for services for our citizens.

Living with predators is a very real issue in rural Oregon. This body has dealt with the conflict between ranchers and cougars, and ranchers and wolves for many legislative sessions. APHIS Wildlife Services is part of the solution that you have used, and it is a tool that Oregon's Counties urge you to continue using.

At the county level, there is a great diversity of activities that Wildlife Services provides. Let me share with you some of the experiences I had as a Douglas County Commissioner.

Douglas County has one of the highest populations of cougars in the state. Wildlife Services routinely deals with cougar sightings near schools, in urban neighborhoods, rural residential neighborhoods and on grazing land. A great deal of the work relates to educating citizens about how they can modify the environment, and their behavior, so that predators are not attracted.

As you can easily imagine, it is a terrifying experience for our citizens to confront a cougar or other large predator, and it is even more terrifying if children are involved. Maintaining the on-the-ground presence of Wildlife Services is a valuable tool to dealing proactively with the presence of predators.

Wildlife Services works with the county parks system to modify habitat and deal with predators (there is a wide range – from skunks to bears and cougars). They provide guidance about management of the parks system and communicating with parks users to inform them of the presence of predators and actions they may take to minimize confrontation. We want recreators to have a safe and rewarding experience, and come back for more.

Wolf populations are increasing and their range is spreading across the state. More counties are working with the issue and will work with it in the future. AOC strongly supports funding of \$800,000 (GF/FF) for wolf-depredation, compensation, non-lethal deterrence and technical assistance to landowners. This request will leverage \$188,000 in federal funds and address the unmet need for increased reimbursements to ranchers for livestock loss and to fund non-lethal measures to avoid wolf-livestock conflict. It will also significantly enhance counties' ability to employ range riders and provide real-time updates on wolf locations. AOC urges you to fund this program and keep this important tool in the tool box.

Thank you for your time and attention. AOC looks forward to working with you on these important issues.

Sincerely



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Association of Oregon Counties