

Dear Representative Witt,

Feb 20, 2019

I am writing a quick note in support of HB 2795 which as retired person who has spent my entire life in Oregon's outdoor and my full career in and around Oregon's forests and high desert. HB 2795 is a sensible approach to professional management using the most effective tools our wildlife professions have to answer the biological and social concerns of our cougar population. Having been directly involved as a lifetime hunter and wildlife observer during the time our depleted cougar numbers were brought back to a balanced number of these cats then seeing the cougar population increase following Measure 18, I feel HB 2795 makes sense. I was and is hunters who supported ODFW in bring back the cougar as a game animal and providing the support to keep the population as sustainable level given all the social concerns and the reality of a population balance with other huntable wildlife. I urge you to support HB 2795.

Additionally, I have to take exception to the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) for their biased February 7, 2019 letter to Chair Witt regarding HB 2795. The tactics of this letter are highly emotional as HSUS calls into question Oregon's volume of science and research in reaching population estimates of about 6600 cougars in Oregon. HSUS is using similar but slightly more polished tactics as their 1994 Measure 18 campaign, an emotionally charged result that drove the Oregon Cougar population up from an estimated 2200-2500 to the current level due to removal of the most effective management tools. Claims by Professor Wielgus such as: "All indications are that Oregon is already severely overkilling cougars and that any additional hunting mortality will result in cougar population collapse." Is simply ridiculous from the view of the rural Oregon human population that sees these animals increasing to a point once rare sightings are becoming commonplace and our urban friends are now reading and responding to near constant news reporting of sightings and encounters in our towns and cities.

Another claim calls out Oregon Hunters Association Conservation Director Jim Akenson saying "The estimate of 6,400 cougars by Mr. Akenson is 3 times higher than observed anywhere in the world and biologically impossible." The number quoted by Mr. Akenson is equal to the scientifically generated estimate of ODFW. The 6400-6600 cougar population is not a number generated from thin air by a "trophy hunter" but a number that comes from the Oregon Cougar Plan, a plan supported by Oregon's wildlife professionals among whom Jim is well respected for a lifetime of field research on large predators.

One would hope the many obvious false claims in the HSUS letter coupled with the emotionally charged wording would be a discredit to their communication. HSUS continues to use tactics that fly in the face of reasonable and profession wildlife science. It appears Professor Wielgus has confused education with intelligence in coming to some of the HSUS and his own conclusions.

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