

March 13, 2019

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

Re: SB 5110, Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 5110, the ODFW Budget for the 2019-21 biennium.

Many of our counties, especially rural counties, have economies and social values that are based on natural resources. The jobs and products that Oregon's wood products industry, farmers, and ranchers create contribute significantly to economic and social stability in rural 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 rural Oregon.

AOC advocates to restore funding in the ODFW budget to APHIS Wildlife Services. Restoring the funding 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.

Keeping the county road system functioning is important for public safety, and for all the aspects of rural economies. In order to keep roads open, county road officials often consult with Wildlife services on drainage issues and wildlife crossings.

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, on grazing land and in our forests. 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.

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

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Susan Morgan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Susan Morgan
Natural Resources Legislative Manager
Association of Oregon Counties