



TESTIMONY

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

March 28, 2019

Natural Resource Coalition Support for SB 301, 303, 398

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Committee:

Our organizations support SB 301, 303, and 398. Together with our groups represent Oregon's farmers, ranchers, timber, small woodlands, and natural resources managers. With nearly 45 million acres in natural resource use in Oregon, private lands provide significant fish and wildlife habitat relied upon by hunters and recreationalists alike. The management of lands and wildlife are critical to Oregon's economy and ecosystems. Over the past years, Oregon's Roosevelt and Rocky Mountain elk populations have grown past the capacity of public lands and are increasingly spreading onto private lands causing significant damage to crops and rangeland.

We are supportive of efforts to improve elk management. Senate Bills 301, 303, and 398 all aim to provide tools for Oregon Department Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) to manage the increasing elk populations across Oregon. Landowners across the state are losing hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost crop value, fence damage, livestock feed, and time in hazing elk off private property. Our members are supportive of ODFW programs that allow landowners to harvest elk in efforts to manage populations and protect valuable crop and rangelands.

ODFW operates the Oregon Landowner Damage Program (OLDP) which was first established in 1996 as part of the Landowner Preference Program (LOP). The LOP was decoupled and modified as a new section of ORS 496.146 (Section 9) in 2013. OLDLP serves Oregon landowners who are experiencing damage to their private property from elk. We believe that the bills before you today would complement and supplement the OLDLP to address increasing elk populations in the state:

SB 301 – Would add elk overpopulation to the criteria of Oregon Landowner Damage Program. Currently, the LOP program can only consider active or historical damage on lands as criteria for issuing a LOP tag. SB 301 would allow ODFW to issue damage tags in areas that are overpopulated. This bill does not change the rules of the LOP but provides a tool for landowners to apply pressure on local elk herds.

SB 303 – Allows LOP tags to be used on adjacent lands with landowner consent. Property lines are not recognized by elk herds, and often landowners are pushing herds to neighboring lands. SB 303 would allow landowners to continue applying pressure on herds on their neighbors' land with consent.

SB 398 – Would create an additional tool for both ODFW and landowners to manage elk populations. The "elk depredation hunting tag" would allow landowners to apply for a tag for every 50 elk on their property. SB 398 provides the benefit of being transferable so local hunters can assist in elk management.

These bills would provide flexibility to the existing management practices ODFW currently utilizes. Collectively we have heard from members across the state that the local ODFW biologists have inconsistently administered LOP tags. ODFW has within their existing authorities the ability to increase harvest levels, modify regulations on current hunting tags, and haze elk of private lands and back onto public lands. Adding a quality assurance check on population survey estimates to ensure accurate counts, as many of our members report higher numbers on their lands. Lands, crops, and infrastructure damage is significant and an economic suppressant on Oregon's natural resource economy.

We support ODFW's mission to balance wildlife on public lands holistically. The current elk management programs have been well used by landowners across the state but are not enough. Elk on private lands is not easily accessible to both apex and human predators. Providing additional tools and resources for landowners will help apply pressure on elk herds to push them back onto public lands.

Thank you for your time and consideration of elk population management and SB 301, 303, and 398. For more information, please contact Jonathan Sandau at sandau@oregonfb.org.