

April 1st, 2019

Members of the House Natural Resource Committee
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 9730



Re: Support for House Bill 3035 – Increasing penalties for certain wildlife offenses

Chair Witt, Vice-Chair Gorsek Vice-Chair Sprenger and Honorable Members of the House Natural Resources Committee:

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife's 33,000 members and supporters across Oregon, I submit the following comments on HB 3035. Defenders of Wildlife works to protect native and imperiled species and their habitat across the country. Defenders is committed to putting a stop to illegal wildlife trafficking and poaching in Oregon. We deeply appreciate this committee's efforts to address our state's growing poaching problem and would like to express our support for HB 3035, which increases the penalty for certain wildlife offenses.

Crimes committed on wildlife often go undocumented because the evidence can difficult to trace. Yet, monitoring programs put in place by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife have demonstrated the gravity of the situation. For instance, one six-year study in Central Oregon found that poaching was responsible for 20% of the region's mule deaths, which was more than the number of licensed hunts in the region. Additionally, 80% of those illegal kills were females which represents a real threat to the future of the population¹. During the 2018 hunting season, troopers working the greater Yamhill and Washington county areas seized 27 firearms used in illegal activity; 16 of those individuals shot a Wildlife Enforcement Decoy at night. Troopers seized 13 unlawfully taken big game animals, six deer, five bull elk, one cougar, one bear, and four geese². In another instance, poaching data for deer and elk from 2015 indicate nearly 500 deer and more than 200 elk were killed illegally¹. These two species also happen to be the most monitored species by ODFW, which is why we have better data on the impacts of poaching. For species that are not monitored like deer or elk but are susceptible to poaching because of their black-market value, commercial value or history of harm and harassment, we are missing crucial information on the rate of illegal killings and its impact on the population of the species. For threatened and endangered species, illegal taking of even one or two individuals can put the population at risk.

HB 3035 is a timely measure to address the growing issue of poaching in Oregon. Poaching has serious consequences for individual animals, populations of species, and on the ecosystem as a whole. For game species, it also affects the availability of hunting opportunities and makes management more difficult for the state. There needs to be stronger accountability and consequences for poaching of wildlife. HB 3035 does that by increasing penalties for the illegal killing or harming of animals. The bill treats the illegal taking of wildlife without a culpable state as a Class A misdemeanor, and the taking

illegal taking of wildlife with a culpable mental state as a Class C felony. We also appreciate and support the inclusion of certain vulnerable species where even a single illegal take (with culpable mental state) would result in a felony. Through this bill, Oregon is sending a clear message that the state is prioritizing the sustainability of its natural resource and promoting ethical hunting so that wildlife can thrive, and Oregonians can continue to enjoy its rich natural resources now and in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. We would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you might have, at skamal@defenders.org.

Sristi Kamal

Sristi Kamal
Senior Representative, Defenders of Wildlife
Portland, Oregon

References:

¹ <https://www.nrdc.org/stories/oregon-has-poaching-problem-and-force-reckon-it>

² <https://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/travel/outdoors/2018/12/20/oregon-poaching-problem-state-police/2333245002/>