



Oregon

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**To: The Honorable Michael Dembrow, Chair
Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources**



HB 3035A

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Dr. Doug Cottam, Wildlife Division Administrator

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

The department appreciates the opportunity to discuss House Bill 3035 A with you today. House Bill 3035 A increases the penalties for certain violations of wildlife laws.

Poaching has a significant impact on fish and wildlife resources in Oregon. Research regarding several big game populations have shown poaching may be greater than that of legal hunter harvest. Additionally, while Oregon is fortunate to have many healthy populations of wildlife, specific species and members of a species can be more sensitive to poaching, and therefore their removal more impactful.

Illegal harvest does not just focus on game animals; it often involves the take of rare, or even threatened and endangered species. Certainly, all species in Oregon are vulnerable to poaching. Below are some examples of species specific impacts:

Columbia White Sturgeon

While large scale poaching outfits have targeted white sturgeon for the illegal take of their eggs for use as caviar, more often sturgeon are targeted for the opportunity to retain an enormous and rare fish. Both poaching efforts have significant consequences for the population.

- Female white sturgeon, compared to other species, produce *a lot* of eggs, and the number of eggs produced is strongly correlated to fish age. A 25-year-old female white sturgeon may produce 250,000 eggs at her first spawn. If the fish survives to age 70, the same fish can produce >1 million eggs *each* spawning cycle. While becoming more rare, large sturgeon have been aged at 100 years or more.
- Because the reproductive value, in numbers of eggs alone, is so much greater for larger fish the magnitude of the impact felt from removing them is much greater.
- A fish that fails to spawn because of poor environmental conditions can try again in 3-5 years. An illegally harvested adult is a lifetime of lost productivity.

Oregon Deer

Mule deer have been in a long-term decline in Oregon and other states. Currently, the population estimate for Oregon is 190,000.

- Poachers killed more mule deer than legal hunters during a six-year study of radio-collared deer in south-central Oregon.
- Poachers often killed females, not bucks, which results in fewer fawns born or surviving their first year.

Black-tailed deer populations experienced a large decline in many areas of western Oregon. In 1998, the black-tailed deer population was estimated at approximately 387,000; in 2014 the population estimate was 320,000 animals and has remained constant.

- SW Oregon black-tailed deer studies have found poaching at about half the level of the mule deer study.
- Lower than expected adult doe survival in black-tailed deer populations make poaching more impactful on the population overall.

Black Bear

Oregon's black bear population is thought to be stable or increasing in most areas. The current statewide black bear population is estimated to be 30,000 animals.

- Bears are highly valued by poachers for the value of their parts on black markets; paws, gall bladders, claws and genitalia are used in traditional Asian medicines.
- Black bear poaching is known to occur year around and often hunters don't differentiate between female bears with cubs and other adult animals as required by legal hunters.
- Additionally, as black bears are considered predatory animals, illegally guided hunts for trophy seeking poachers become lucrative opportunities.

Poaching causes economic impacts in Oregon. A significant portion of wildlife management and conservation is funded through hunting and angling activities. This is a major driver of Oregon rural economies, and includes ecotourism dependent on viewing wildlife in the state.

The report, *Fishing, Hunting, Wildlife Viewing, and Shellfishing in Oregon; 2008 State and County Expenditure Estimates*, determined 2.8 million Oregon residents and nonresidents participated in fishing, hunting, wildlife viewing and shellfish harvesting in Oregon (Dean Runyan Associates, 2009). When travel-generated expenditures, equipment expenditures, and direct expenditure on the recreational activity at a location were totaled, over 2.5 billion dollars was spent on these four activities.

Finally, prior to the enactment of wildlife protection laws in the 1900's, the commercial killing of wildlife devastated fish and wildlife populations in the United States. Federal and state laws, making it illegal to sell meat and parts of fish and wildlife, have helped recover many species. Despite these laws, illegal commercial harvest of fish and wildlife continues. Increased penalties can act as a deterrent, especially in the face of economic drivers and commercialization of wildlife.

The department appreciates the opportunity to work with Legislatures and stakeholders on deterring and preventing poaching in Oregon. Thank you for your consideration of this critical issue.