

May 20th 2019

Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources.
900 NE Court Street
Salem, Oregon



Re: Testimony in support of HB 2841 - sensitive wildlife location data bill

Chair Dembrow, Co-Chair Olsen and Members of the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

My name is Dr Sristi Kamal and I am the Senior Representative for Defenders of Wildlife in Oregon. Defenders is a national wildlife conservation organization that focuses on conserving imperiled and native species and their habitats and has 1.8 million members nationwide. Today, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly talk about House Bill 2841 and the purpose behind the bill.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is the main agency responsible for conservation and management of wildlife in Oregon. ODFW maintains data pertaining to the exact location of individuals of many species through equipment such as radio collars, as well as the location of sensitive habitat use such as breeding grounds, nesting or denning sites and spawning grounds. Such data is essential for the agency to make critical decisions related to the recovery and management of Oregon's wildlife. However, in doing so, the agency puts these individuals and their population at risk of being harmed or harassed simply because we chose to monitor them.

HB 2841 is a small but discrete measure that will help protect vulnerable wildlife species from those intending harm or harassment by protecting sensitive location information that ODFW collects. The key features of the bill include:

- ***ODFW may choose to protect sensitive location data*** of listed species (threatened, endangered or sensitive species) or data of species with commercial value, black market value, history of unlawful take, harm or harassment, or endemic species
- ***The bill protects location data only.*** This includes real time location of individuals that are radio collared, or exact location of dens, nests or breeding grounds.
- ***The bill makes provisions to release such information*** at an aggregated scale, or when it concerns the health and population of a species.
- ***It makes exemptions for groups that might need such information for livelihood and management decisions*** such as public agencies, educational institutions, landowners, farmers, forestry operators and other management partners and stakeholders
- ***It allows for access to such information when used in petitions and litigations*** for the conservation of a species

Poaching in Oregon is a growing problem and public access to sensitive location information of wildlife makes them very vulnerable to poaching and other harm or harassment that have direct impact on their breeding, nurturing and hunting behaviors. Crimes committed on wildlife often go undocumented because the evidence can be difficult to trace. The little evidence we have from the few monitoring programs put in place have, however,

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 in the greater Yamhill and Washington countries seized 27 firearms used in illegal activity, 16 of which were used to shoot wildlife decoy. Troopers also seized 13 unlawfully ahem 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.

The bill went through additional amendment to ensure that the bill did the best job it could in balancing the protection of such information while providing access to such data when needed. Specifically, ***the exemption clause for farmers and foresters and the clause on allowing access to such information for petitions and litigations were added in this amendment***. Keeping in perspective the main goal of the bill — which is to protect vulnerable wildlife — I strongly believe that the bill has allowed for as much access to information as possible without making it ineffective in addressing poaching concerns. Putting this bill forward in the current session has also drawn attention to the fact that this information is available to the public and those that weren't aware of such access to information are aware of it now. This makes HB 2841 especially time sensitive and I urge you to support the bill this session as delaying such a measure will continue to put the lives of many vulnerable wildlife at risk. Your support this session can help prevent another disheartening year of poaching statistics in Oregon and allow vulnerable wildlife to survive and thrive in our beautiful state.

I will be happy to address any questions that you might have regarding HB 2841. You can contact me at skamal@defenders.org

Thanking you



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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/>