

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)

Dear Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Olsen and Members of the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 2841. The undersigned groups represent thousands of Oregonians from all parts of the state and would like to request you to support HB 2841, with its latest amendment as a preventative and precautionary measure to protect vulnerable individuals of wildlife species by protecting information related to their exact location, or the location of their sensitive life stages. It is a narrowly crafted measure that will address Oregon's growing poaching problem and protect taxpayer investments in research, monitoring and wildlife management. The bill establishes parameters for the protection of sensitive wildlife location data collected by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for research and wildlife management for species that are especially vulnerable to poaching and harassment.

Poaching in Oregon is a growing problem and public access to sensitive location information of wildlife species makes them vulnerable to poaching. Currently, anyone can access sensitive wildlife location data, including radio collar information and location of breeding or nesting sites. This makes individuals that are radio-collared or monitored in other ways vulnerable to poaching and other means of harm or harassment. For species that reuse breeding or nesting sites throughout their life, the current policy compromises their safety year after year. Additionally, wildlife research and monitoring requires a large investment of resources by ODFW. Failure to protect information collected through tools such as radio collars is a waste of taxpayer dollars.

HB 2841 adds a narrow exemption to the Public Records Act so that sensitive wildlife location information may be withheld if it poses risk to an individual or a population of a fish or wildlife species. However, while the aim objective of the bill is to protect sensitive location data of wildlife, it still preserves access to such sensitive information for groups and individuals that need such information to protect their livelihoods or carry forward wildlife conservation objectives, such as governmental, educational, tribal entities, landowners, farmers forestry operators and other ODFW management partners.

While the objective of the bill is to protect location of vulnerable individuals from poachers and others with malicious intent, HB 2841 also ensures that the information remains accessible to those who need it to make livelihood and management decisions, such as landowners, tribal entities, farmers, educational institutions and other ODFW management partners and stakeholders. The objective of the bill is not to completely restrict access to such information, but only to keep it out of the hands of those with malicious intent. As the number of individuals monitored in the state increase, so does the amount of sensitive data that remain open to everyone putting these vulnerable individuals at a very high risk of harm, harassment and poaching.

We, therefore, urge you to support HB 2841, with its latest amendment, as a step toward addressing the problem of poaching, and promoting ethical hunting in Oregon. Our wildlife is a precious natural resource and we need to protect it for the current and future generation of Oregonians.

Thanking you

Sincerely

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