



May 6, 2021

Dear Chair Hudson and Members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding “state agency responses to problematic wildlife encounters in populated areas.” I appreciate the opportunity to participate in a discussion about this important topic.

I am not going to comment specifically on the situation with the young black bear. I do not have enough information at this time to offer an informed critique of the situation and I know from experience that these situations can be complex. What I will offer is my perspective that Oregon does not have adequate systems or resources in place right now to reliably provide adequate responses for distressed wildlife, reliable information for the general public regarding distressed wildlife and wildlife conflicts, or to maximize the efficacy of the various agencies that are called upon to respond to these situations.

I have three decades of experience directing Oregon’s busiest wildlife rehabilitation center. We work under permits issued by both Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and we are part of a network of approximately a dozen wildlife rehabilitation centers in Oregon that have been set up to provide humane and ecologically responsible care for injured/ orphaned wildlife and to provide assistance to the public with their wildlife concerns. Our center is staffed by three trained wildlife rehabilitators, a half-time veterinarian and more than 100 active volunteers, we are open 365 days/ year, 8-12 hours/ day and we do this work free of charge. During my tenure, we have treated more than 100,000 wild animals and responded to more than 300,000 wildlife related calls from the general public. I have also served on many state advisory committees that have addressed capture, care, treatment and euthanasia of wild animals.

Our goals in doing this work are multifold:

- We want to provide humane and ecologically responsible care for individual wild animals in distress;
- We want to address and reduce the challenges facing wildlife at both a local and landscape scale;
- We want to provide excellent service to the public and engage the community in wildlife stewardship;
 - We want to be proactive and prevent and resolve problems before they occur;

- We want to provide one stop shopping--- to either resolve a callers concern or get them to somebody else who can;
- Time and patience are critical—these situations are complex and dynamic and quick answers do not always generate successful outcomes;
- We want to create a community that is aware and empathetic towards wildlife and active in wildlife stewardship.

We work frequently and collaboratively with both Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Oregon State Police. We do a lot of good work together and I do want to emphasize and acknowledge the positive aspects of our relationship with those agencies today and the many dedicated staff that work at those agencies. That should not be lost in this discussion.

I also want to acknowledge that each one of these wildlife situations can be incredibly dynamic, challenging and stressful. Nobody gets up in the morning expecting to have a bird fly into their window, or hit a deer with their car or find an orphaned black bear. Most people, especially in urban areas, have minimal idea about what to do when a raccoon moves into the attic, a coyote runs off with their cat or they find fledgling birds on the ground. In most cases, people do not have immediate access or knowledge about how to best address these situations or even know who to call. A multitude of agencies and individuals may get called to respond and those agencies may or may not have either expertise or resources readily available to respond. Failure to provide solutions can result not only in further harm to animals, but also put people at risk as well.

However, each of these situations is also an incredible opportunity. We find that the majority of calls we receive can be resolved in the field without removing a wild animals from the environment if we are proactive in our response. We also find that for the animals that do come into our facility, the prognosis for success increases dramatically if we get them sooner. Finally, each one of these situations is an opportunity to engage with the public and educate them about living with wildlife and wildlife stewardship. We have found that our work at our care center is one of our most powerful tools for engaging urban residents, many of whom had not previously thought much about urban wildlife, with the wildlife that surrounds them.

However, our systems are not where they need to be. Some of the core systemic challenges when I first began doing this work three decades ago continue to persist today. Agencies have been slow to understand that while wildlife management appropriately focuses much of its energy at the species level, there also must be a place for compassion and empathy for other living creatures. Agencies have also been slow to recognize that managing wildlife on an urban landscape inherently requires proactively engaging the community in wildlife stewardship. Investment in conservation of urban wildlife populations and engaging urban audiences remains a low and poorly funded priority. When it comes to urban wildlife situations, the public is too often treated as a nuisance and wild animals are too often treated as disposable. Neither furthers the cause of wildlife conservation.

At a broader level, we are concerned that these challenges reflective of an agency that is increasingly out of step with the general public: An agency that views itself as a traditional “fish and game agency” rather than an agency which truly embraces a broader more holistic conservation mission. This is

reflected in a recent survey, *America's Wildlife Values: The Social Context for Wildlife Management in the United States*¹ produced by the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies et al. which found that ODFW staff is heavily dominated by “traditionalists”² while the public is increasingly dominated by “mutualists”³ to the extent that a nearly 30 percentage point gap now exists between the values held by the majority of agency staff and the values held by the public at large.

We would make the following recommendations:

1. **Wildlife Response Task Force:** Establish a Task Force to take a comprehensive look at the strengths and weaknesses of existing wildlife response network in Oregon including the regulatory framework, policies, funding, response resources, communications and public engagement. ODFW should work with public and NGO stakeholders to review its rules, regulations, policies and procedures regarding captive wildlife care and treatment and also human-wildlife conflict situations to ensure that they are consistent with current best practices, prioritize non-lethal approaches and do not create unnecessary barriers to providing animal care and promoting ecologically responsible, humane outcomes.
2. **Invest Funding for Wildlife Response Network:** The state should consider investment in building expanding and supporting the existing network of wildlife rehabilitation centers across the state of Oregon which provide care for distressed wildlife and information resources for the public to resolve wildlife conflicts and promote wildlife stewardship. For example, in 2017, California passed **Assembly Bill 1031** and created the Native California Wildlife Rehabilitation Voluntary Tax Contribution Fund on the state's income tax form. Thanks to taxpayers' generosity, more than \$820,000 has been donated as of October 2020.
3. **Invest in the ODFW Non-game Wildlife Program:** The legislature should continue to invest in ODFW programs, staffing and commission appointments that promote a holistic approach to wildlife management and conservation (including funding of the ODFW Conservation Strategy) and which prioritize outreach and engagement of new audiences including urban populations and underserved populations. It is critical that ODFW shift in terms of funding, priorities and internal culture to better reflect and support the values of Oregonians as a whole.
4. **Develop Better Communication Systems for both response agencies and the general public:** ODFW should develop effective systems to provide the public with accessible information about available public and non-governmental wildlife support/ response services and to promote better coordination among wildlife response agencies.
5. **Provide regular cross training opportunities for agencies and organizations likely to get calls about urban wildlife situations:** (Police Depts., Sheriffs, OSP, County animal's services, shelters, veterinarians, etc.) .

¹ <https://content.warnercnr.colostate.edu/AWV/OR-WildlifeValuesReport.pdf>

² Traditionalists are defined as people who view wildlife as subordinate and for the benefit of humans, believe wildlife should be killed if they threaten property or lives and believe populations of wildlife should support fishing and hunting.

³ Mutualists are defined as people who embrace wildlife as part of a person's extended social network. See animals as family and deserving of caring and rights, like humans, and believe humans and wildlife should live side by side without fear.

6. **Work with NGO Stakeholders to develop and implement proactive “Living with Urban Wildlife” Outreach programs:** to address and prevent human-wildlife conflicts and promote humane and ecologically responsible urban wildlife stewardship.

We value our work with ODFW, OSP and other agencies and hope that these comments will be received in the constructive way in which they are intended. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bob Sallinger". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Bob Sallinger
Conservation Director
Audubon Society of Portland