



TO: Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery

FROM: Amaroq Weiss, Center for Biological Diversity
Bethany Cotton, Cascadia Wildlands
Danielle Moser, Oregon Wild

DATE: April 5, 2021

RE: SB 642 – Appropriating General Funds for the Wolf Management Compensation and Proactive Trust Fund

On behalf of the Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands and Oregon Wild, we respectfully submit the following comments opposing SB 642 as written, which appropriates General Fund monies to the Wolf Management Compensation and Proactive Trust Fund (“Fund”). We believe that compensation can in some cases be an important tool for addressing livestock-wolf conflicts in Oregon if it aids in increasing social tolerance for coexisting with wolves, given that was the explicit intent of the creation of the Fund. However, we cannot support SB 642 until meaningful reforms are adopted in the administration of the Fund providing long necessary standardization, transparency and accountability.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a 501(c)(3) national, non-profit conservation organization, with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places. Cascadia Wildlands is a 501(c)(3) non-profit with over 12,000 members and supporters dedicated to defending and restoring Cascadia’s wild ecosystems. Oregon Wild, which has 20,000 members and supporters, is a state-based organization dedicated to protecting and restoring Oregon’s wildlands, wildlife and waters.

Our three organizations have been integrally involved in wolf recovery and conservation efforts in Oregon since the arrival of wolves to this state. One of the undersigned was an original stakeholder representative in the Wolf Advisory Committee appointed by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to advise the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in the crafting of the state’s very first Wolf Conservation and Management Plan (“Plan”).

The Plan, adopted in 2005 and revised in 2010 and 2019, has from the start envisioned and included a recommendation for the creation of a state-funded Wolf Compensation and Proactive Measures Trust Fund as a means to increase social tolerance for coexisting with wolves. However, the envisioned Fund was one built upon transparent guidelines, including requirements for documentation, and with an

understanding that these provisions would be applied consistently throughout the state, and that the clear, consistent requirements would be enforced.

Since the creation of the Fund, the public has had the opportunity to witness and evaluate the Fund's implementation. The evidence is clear: the Fund's implementation in the past and present has not been consistent with transparency, abuse-prevention, state-wide consistent application, or good governance. Nor have any surveys been conducted by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife or the Oregon Department of Agriculture to determine whether the Fund's existence and application has — in fact — resulted in increased social tolerance for coexisting with wolves by livestock owners.

The many flaws of the Fund were brought to the attention of the public in an [investigative journalism piece published by Oregon Public Broadcasting in 2017](#). While the article spurred justifiable shock and concern, the problems it identified have not been solved. In the intervening years, the state failed to reform the Fund to prevent ongoing lax documentation, payment for claims which defy biological evidence and extreme inconsistency in how the Fund is operated county by county. Nor have any attitude surveys been conducted to determine whether the Fund is meeting the very goal for which it was instituted. Ideally, longitudinal surveys (surveys conducted every few years, over time) would have been conducted.

We recommend the Secretary of State's office perform an audit of the program to uncover and identify these areas of abuses. Anything less is fiscally irresponsible. We also recommend that a program of longitudinal surveys be immediately launched. Without a scientific assessment of livestock owners' attitudes over time, it is not possible to know if the Fund is even achieving success of its primary goal.

SB 642 seeks to not only maintain the Fund but to increase the allocation of General Funds available. Without explicit plans and timelines for reforming this program, and surveys to assess its effectiveness, we cannot support SB 642. We urge you to oppose this use of taxpayer funds for a program which has shown itself to be non-transparent, inconsistently applied and subject to abuse.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns. You can reach Amaroq Weiss at aweiss@biologicaldiversity.org, Bethany Cotton at bethany@cascwild.org, and Danielle Moser at dm@oregonwild.org.