

Submitter: Wally Sykes

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Agriculture, Land Use, and Water

Measure: HB4127

Chair Helm and Committee Members:

My names is Wally Sykes. I've lived in Wallowa County for over 26 years and have been on the Wallowa County Wolf Compensation Committee since 2010.

I'm asking you to vote against HB4127.

The section of the Wolf Compensation Program providing full market compensation for cattle deemed "missing" by the livestock producers relies on claims unsupported by verifiable evidence in a process wholly lacking in transparency.

Livestock can go missing for many reasons. These include injury, disease, eating poison plants such as larkspur, drinking water poisoned by toxic algae, accidents, predation by bear or cougar as well as by wolf, predation of sick or injured animals unattended by ranchers, theft, cattle moving into remote gullies and canyons and being missed during round-up, and negligence.

A good example of negligence unwound in Wallowa County late last year when stock were left on forest service allotments long past the end of the legal grazing period and were caught in heavy December snow. Many died. Media reported about 60 head, some with calves, were left on the allotment, not all from one ranch. Could these animals have been claimed as "missing" and the rancher compensated if there had been no media coverage? It's certainly possible under the current program. I've seen livestock on allotments as late as December and wondered if they were recovered that year or next summer, or never. All these animals could be claimed as indirect losses and who could could say nay.

As a Compensation Committee member, I've voted on missing cattle claims. Sometimes I feel the producer is trustworthy, the claim seems reasonable and I support it. Sometimes the claim seems exaggerated and/or doubtful. How to know what became of the missing livestock or, without independent verification, even to know if the counts are accurate? For 2019, Wallowa County ranchers claimed \$1,800 in direct losses, \$47,000 in indirect losses. The discrepancy seems out of proportion. Even if the stock count is accurate, all missing cattle are not victims of wolf predation. Yet the claims are approved by the Committee.

So far, funding has usually been insufficient to pay fully for indirect losses, which is good because a significant percentage of the claims are surely baseless. HB4127, by

providing \$1million in additional funds, on top of the recent increase of \$400,000 (as yet unspent), will retroactively pay unwarranted claims and encourage future abuse of the compensation program and the taxpayer's money.

Please do not support this irresponsible Bill.

Thank you,

Wally Sykes  
Joseph, OR