

Subject: Testimony in opposition to HB 4080 (predator damage control districts)

Dear Chair Marsh, Vice Chair Hudson, Vice Chair Brock Smith and Members of the House Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

We are co-founders of the Benton County Agriculture and Wildlife Protection Program ([AWPP](#)). This county-operated non-lethal wildlife deterrents grant program has a nearly spotless record of assisting ranchers with protecting livestock from cougars and other predators.

HB 4080 would make PERMANENT a controversial predator damage control pilot program which allows individual farmers to funnel money directly to U.S. Government trappers to kill native wildlife within county-based districts.

Predator Control District programs allow farmers with UNPROTECTED livestock to hire U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services government trappers to kill wildlife in response to livestock losses. The programs do not REQUIRE farmers to protect their livestock using non-lethal deterrents such as electric fencing, livestock guardian animals, and protective housing.

Research has shown that killing carnivores can increase rather than decrease conflicts with livestock. First documented in a Washington state [study](#) published in 2009, there are now several studies corroborating this finding. The most recent [research](#) from California concludes:

"The permanent removal of offending individuals appears to increase the potential for conflict in the following year. Broadly speaking, improving husbandry standards for pets and small hoofstock living in areas occupied by large carnivores may be the most effective way to reduce human–predator conflict in California and elsewhere."

While ranchers may choose to waste their own money on counterproductive lethal methods in an attempt to protect their livestock, a portion of predator damage control district programs is paid for by all taxpayers through federal and state matching funds. Regardless of where funds for these lethal control programs come from, our state government should not enable farmers to kill native wildlife when effective non-lethal wildlife deterrents exist.

As you know, a sunset clause suggests a program needs to prove itself to continue, but proponents have not produced even the most basic report on the activities or effectiveness of control district programs.

Rushing HB 4080 through a short legislative session will not allow time for the full discussion and debate this controversial pilot program requires.

Respectfully,

Randy and Pam Comeleo