Oregon Wildlife Coalition

Wildlife Advocates Oppose House Bill 4080

HB 4080 would authorize unaccountable government districts to raise money for killing wildlife deemed a threat to private property, without any requirement to consider nonlethal alternatives. The Oregon Wildlife Coalition[1] and other wildlife advocates oppose this bill. The Oregon Conservation Network has named it a "Major Threat to a Healthy Oregon." What Oregon needs instead is a broader conversation on how public money is used for "predator control."

Background

HB 4080 would authorize special districts that collect money from landowners "for the purpose of funding county services to prevent, reduce and mitigate damage to property from predatory animals." (Section 2(1)(a).) Targeted animals could include "bears, gray wolves, red foxes, gray foxes, coyotes, cougars, bobcats, beavers, fishers, martens, minks, muskrats, otters, raccoons, feral swine * * * rabbits, rodents and birds that are or may be destructive to agricultural crops, products and activities." (Section 1(6)(a).) A similar program was created in 2015 but sunset at the beginning of this year. A 2021 bill to remove the sunset (HB 3167) did not pass.

Reasons to Oppose HB 4080

The Money Would Go to a Federal Program Known for Cruel and Unnecessary Killing. In practice, money raised by the districts would go, as it has in the past, to "Wildlife Services" – a highly controversial program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that carries out "predator control" on public and private lands with poisoning, trapping, snaring, aerial gunning, and paid hunters. (*See Exposed – USDA's Secret War on Wildlife* (short documentary film); *The Rogue Agency*, Harper's Magazine (2016).) In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, Wildlife Services killed 201,606 animals in Oregon, including 210 bears, 2,147 coyotes and 92 mountain lions, using methods including neck and leg snares, cages and foothold traps, aerial gunning and paid hunters. (Wildlife Services Data Reports 2019-2020, pp. 210-26.) Science increasingly shows all that killing doesn't reduce conflict and may increase it. (E.g., *Killing Coyotes Is Not As Effective As Once Thought, Researchers Say*, National Public Radio (2019); Scientific Opinion Letter, Yellowstone Ecological Research Center (2012).)

There Would Be No Requirement to Consider Nonlethal Alternatives. HB 4080 includes language that would *permit* use of district funds for nonlethal measures. However, it would not *require* recipients of district funds to use or even consider such measures.[2] Given its reputation

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[1] The Oregon Wildlife Coalition consists of Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, the Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Oregon Wild, Portland Audubon, Western Environmental Law Center and WildEarth Guardians.

[2] Nonlethal measures include fencing, protective housing, electronic scare devices and guard dogs. For more information on nonlethal techniques, see this website for a Benton County program that emphasizes the use of these tools.

for killing wildlife as its preferred solution to human-wildlife conflict (see references above), Wildlife Services cannot simply be trusted to do the right thing.

The Districts Would be Unaccountable to the Public. HB 4080 includes a provision specifically designed to prevent the public from holding the special districts accountable. (Section 8.) Thus, even if HB 4080 had something in it to protect the public interest in wildlife (which it doesn't), the bill would prevent enforcement of that.

Oregon Needs a Broader Conversation on the Role of Government in "Predator Control." In addition to receiving money from "predator damage control districts," "Wildlife Services" receives money from general fund appropriations to the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Before resurrecting "predator control districts," Oregon should take a hard look – through a stakeholder workgroup or otherwise – at how this money is spent, whether it results in excessive and unnecessary killing of wildlife, and whether public funding should be discontinued or at least have additional sideboards.

Contacts:

Brian Posewitz, Humane Voters Oregon, brian@humanevotersoregon.org
Sristi Kamal, Defenders of Wildlife, skamal@defenders.org
Kelly Peterson, Humane Society of the United States, kpeterson@humanesociety.org

On behalf of the Oregon Wildlife Coalition:

Also opposing HB 4080: