

Testimony RE: HB 4080, Relating to a principal Act for predator damage control districts



February 9, 2022

Chair Marsh, Vice-Chairs Hudson and Smith, Committee Members:

HB 4080 would authorize the creation of “predator damage control districts” and would apparently pay Wildlife Services to kill wildlife.

Wildlife Services is a program of the US Department of Agriculture intended resolve wildlife interactions that threaten public health and safety, as well as agricultural, property, and natural resources.

In the fiscal year ending June 30, 2020, Wildlife Services had apparently 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.)

Wildlife Services therefore, just in that one year alone killed thousands of predators and other animals in Oregon without any evidence that any individual animal posed a real threat, and so all that apparently is needed to kill is a perceived or hypothetical threat. It's essentially like saying, that since any human being could potentially kill another human being in the future, that to prevent this happening, they should be killed before they can kill another.

When I read the number of over two hundred thousand animals killed, I immediately thought of the negative impacts that the death of this many animals must have on the biodiversity of the state, on it's habitats and ecosystems.

And my thought, my scientific guess, was quickly validated by a paper authored by researchers at Oregon State University itself, and published in the European Journal of Wildlife Research during 2012. One might argue that this is an old study, now over a decade old, however what makes it compelling is that it ". . . examined 42 studies done over the past 50 years . . ."* at the time. That in itself not only speaks to its continued validity today, but also especially based in the conclusions it reached at the time.

Namely, ". . . It found that the loss of major predators in forest ecosystems has allowed game animal populations to greatly increase, crippling the growth of young trees and reducing biodiversity . . ."



Yes, reducing biodiversity. And biodiversity, the variety of life on Earth at all its levels, from genes to ecosystems, can include the evolutionary, ecological, and cultural processes that sustain life, for what it provides to humans, as well as for the value it has in its own right. Many basic needs humans obtain from biodiversity such as food and shelter, are especially relevant to Oregon in terms of agriculture and wood products. So, protecting biodiversity is important to human and animal life. So, protecting the lives of individual animals who haven't committed any crime, so to speak, is important to ensuring biodiversity, which ultimately serves us everyone, people and wildlife.

One might argue though, that the legislation also allows for non-lethal methods. However, the proposed bill does not "require" it as the option of first choice, and thus again, does not protect biodiversity. In my experience, when given a choice, the quick reaction seems to be to kill, and not a considered response of protecting all life, on both sides of the fence, so to speak.

Therefore, since this bill would essentially enable Wildlife Services to continue the killing of so many animals, and simply based apparently any hypothetical threat, with it's negative impacts to biodiversity within our state, I am opposed to HB 4080 moving forward.

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Al LePage". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Al LePage, B.S. Biology, M. Ed. Science
Society for Conservation Biology, Member

* A more detailed, but user-friendly, article about this research, can be found at this link.

<https://today.oregonstate.edu/archives/2012/apr/loss-predators-northern-hemisphere-affecting-ecosystem-health> Research by W. J. Ripple: R. L. Beschta, College of Forestry, Oregon State University, 2012