

My name is Tom Birkmaier, and I am a 4th generation rancher in Wallowa County. Our spring, summer and fall pastures are primarily located in the northern section of Wallowa County, specifically the Zumwalt Prairie and the Chesnimnus area. In the past several years, our ranch and family have been heavily impacted by the Chesnimnus wolf pack. This pack was first established in 2015, and since that time has had varying numbers within the pack, ranging from 6 to 14.

Since 2020, this pack has been devastating to ranchers in our area. At this time, the Chesnimnus pack is responsible for over 20 confirmed depredations, including 13 confirmed depredations/injuries in the 2022 year. In conversation with just three other ranchers in the Zumwalt/Chesnimnus area, they are conservatively guessing losses of 40 calves in 2022. Please keep in mind, with a pack that is currently 13 wolves, not much of a calf carcass is left for an investigation within 24 hours of death, making the Oregon Department of Wildlife determination of death for these animals very difficult given the current ODF&W Wolf Conservation and Management Plan guidelines.

At this time, it is understood that in just Wallowa County, nine wolf packs reside in and/or inhabit part of the County. ODF&W has stated that the population in Wallowa County is saturated. This number does not include packs located in other parts of the state of Oregon, nor the fact that the wolf populations in these other areas will continue to grow and potentially become saturated as well. Sadly, the loss of livestock, stress on ranchers and ranching families both financially and emotionally is something occurring around the state of Oregon. Furthermore, at this time, the issue is become more prominent as the wolf populations grow.

As areas around the state become saturated with wolf populations, similar to what Wallowa County is currently experiencing, additional funds are needed to allow for co-habitation of wolves and livestock. Producers around the state are experiencing difficulties in being able to protect their livestock and practice non-lethal methods due to the lack of funding, lack of labor, and lack of competent individuals willing to work. For example, in 2022 Wallowa County employed only one part-time range rider, for the county which has over 3,147 square miles and very diverse topography. This was obviously inadequate, especially with the highly concentrated wolf numbers.

Additional funding is essential if Oregon ranchers are to continue non-lethal efforts to protect livestock from predation. To further this point, there have been several agencies and ranchers that have put in hundreds of hours to protect their livestock using non-lethal methods, the non-lethal has proven to be only partially successful with this amount of effort, as depredations still occurred with these intense measures. At the same time, those hours spent with the livestock means that other ranch duties such as fence maintenance, weed spraying, pasture monitoring, water improvements, irrigation, and other essential tasks are not being completed and/or are being done by extra labor, adding to the overall cost that the ranchers are spending.

In 2021 and 2022, the state of Oregon had a missing livestock compensation which was paid out 20% and 50% respectively, of fair market value to producers. This very minimal compensation has resulted in most ranchers finding it economically impractical to be successful at practicing non-lethal methods, (which is proving to require hundreds of hours to be successful). Further, at this rate of pay, producers are also finding the inadequate funds impractical for even reporting depredated livestock. This is causing a major issue in management of the wolves as generations are teaching new generations to hunt and kill livestock, straying away from their intended prey and perpetuating the wolf/livestock issue.

For this reason, I strongly support SB 471 in providing an additional \$800,000 for Oregon livestock producers. These monies can be used to leverage cost-share and matching monies with state, federal, and private entities.

Thank you for your consideration, and I appreciate the opportunity to publicly support this bill.

Sincerely,

Tom Birkmaier