

Chair Helm, Vice Chairs Owens and Hartman, and members of the committee:

My name is Ellie Gage. I am a livestock producer, a mother, a member of Oregon Cattlemen's Association, and graduate student in the College of Natural Resources at the University of Idaho. Over the last several years, I have had the opportunity to participate in discussions with the Conflict Reduction Consortium, a west-wide collaborative group of diverse stakeholders including government agency personnel, nongovernmental conservation groups, and livestock producers. These recommendations are a product of those collaborations.

I support House Bill 2631 for the following reasons:

I envision landscapes where people, livestock, and wildlife all thrive, where management practices work in concert with state and federal policy to reduce conflicts, and where economic solutions support resilient, biodiverse working lands.

The presence of wolves on western landscapes is valued by the American public, but wolves have a disproportionate cost to people who live in close proximity to them. Compensating livestock producers by addressing those costs **is society's role and responsibility in supporting wolves on the landscape**. Wildlife is a public resource and the cost of providing critical habitat needs to be shared and reflect the extent of public support for conservation. When considering the economic impact of wolves on livestock, we must evaluate both direct and indirect effects:

Direct effects of wolves are killed or injured livestock.

Indirect effects of wolves include decreased weaning weights and conception rates, increased abortions, increased sickness in livestock and producer's time and labor.

A compensation ratio of 7:1 is an impactful way to compensate for indirect losses and kills that cannot be confirmed due to lack of physical evidence on the carcass. Producers care deeply for their livestock, **they are committed to protecting them**, and it is an unfair assumption that producers would not work to protect their livestock if they are being appropriately compensated for production losses. I think that everyone who heard Tom Birkmaier's testimony was deeply moved. Nonlethal tools **are a part of the solution to reducing conflict with wolves**: they do not completely prevent depredations, or the indirect losses experienced by producers. While producers must be profitable to be sustainable, the drive to work in ranching is rooted in rural communities, the love of livestock and wildlife, and the land they steward.

HB 2631 would provide compensation payment at a ratio for **confirmed or probable depredations only**. Confirming the species responsible is tedious, and many investigations cannot be determined due to a lack of evidence on the carcass. In areas with a high density of wolves, livestock can be killed and consumed completely, leaving insufficient evidence for the depredation investigation determination. There is not a producer who exists who would put their

herd or flock at risk in hopes that they can get enough confirmed depredations to be paid better for confirmed kills than at the sale yard.

The people who spoke in opposition to HB 2631 are knowledgeable, many have strong backgrounds in conservation and bring an important perspective to the table. But with all due respect, the greatest value that testimony provided was in showing how pervasive the lack of understanding of the sociocultural challenges of gray wolf management, ranchers, rural communities, and the value of working lands for wildlife is.

Colorado is a state with a similar culture and demographics to Oregon, and Colorado is moving forward with a 7:1 compensation ratio for confirmed depredations with **broad consensus across party lines from diverse stakeholders including wildlife commissioners, state legislators, producers, and wildlife advocates**. There is widely supported consensus in Colorado that a multiplier is critical and impactful, and I strongly believe this is the best path forward in Oregon as well.

I'd like to end with a quote from Robert Bonnie, Undersecretary of Agriculture for the US Department of Natural Resources.

"It turns out that rural folks care just as much about the environment as folks that live in cities or in suburbia. Everyone in America believes that we *should* conserve the environment, rural folks care about *how* we conserve the environment. What's more, it turns out a lot of ranchers and farmers *actually know a thing or two* about stewardship, and they want to be at the table to develop solutions. Maybe, instead of waging war, we ought to build a broad middle that will support conservation no matter who is in office."

Producers who are affected by the presence of wolves on the landscape have clearly asked for public support in living with the public resource that is wolves. **Appropriately compensating livestock producers for wolf-related losses is not waging war, it's a solution coming from the radical center, where shared visions live and where wolves and working lands both can have a future in the west.**

For these reasons, I support HB 2631. Thank you for considering my testimony.