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On Behalf Of:  
Committee: Senate Committee On Natural Resources and  
Wildfire  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB769

I spoke online during the meeting for public testimony. I ran short of time and wanted to share with you what I intended to say.

Good afternoon. I take my opportunity to share my thoughts with you today very seriously, and I thank you all sincerely for your time.

In preparing for this, I wrote and re-wrote page after page. It was frustrating at first because there is simply no way to fit all of my thoughts into two minutes of time.

Eventually, I realized that my inability to summarize this issue is actually part of the point I want to make. It is not our job to understand every detail of cougar management in Oregon. Thankfully, we have hired professional wildlife biologists to do that. These people have made it their life's work to not only understand cougars, but to understand the complex relationship between all wildlife in their specific part of Oregon.

The simple fact is that cougars are incredibly effective predators. They are also very territorial, and especially when prey populations are low, each cat requires a large territory. when left unmanaged, it turns into the problem we have now in Oregon. Deer populations are low across the state, and nearly half of our annual lion harvest is being done by agents of the state, using dogs to kill cougars on damage control complaints.

Hunting with dogs is the only effective way to manage cougar populations. Taking that tool away from our professional wildlife biologists was a mistake. Not only has it been bad for deer, but it has been bad for the lions themselves. Overpopulation has made it difficult for lions to sustain themselves in suitable habitat and forced them into conflict with people.

Ineffective cougar management has also left the people closest to the issue feeling like they don't have a voice. I devote a lot of time to volunteering for habitat conservation groups, and it is getting harder to find support. People are developing a defeatist attitude of "What is the point of conserving habitat if predators are not managed properly?" In much of Oregon, people have become so disenfranchised by the process that they don't even want to be part of Oregon anymore. This is a sad fact, and one that warrants serious consideration.

Nobody here is asking for the right to make wildlife management decisions. We are simply asking to be able to let the professional wildlife biologists do their job without being dictated by uninformed people from outside of their county. This is not too much to ask.

I hope you will all support Senate Bill 769.

Thank you again for your time.

Anthony (Tony) Pettis