



Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

February 13, 2025

Re: Testimony in opposition of SB 777 and its -1 amendment

Chair Golden, Vice Chair Nash and Members of the Committee

This testimony is submitted by the Oregon Wildlife Coalition **in opposition to SB 777 and its -1 amendment**. Members of the Oregon Wildlife Coalition include Bird Alliance of Oregon, Cascadia Wildlands, Defenders of Wildlife, Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Oregon Wild, Think Wild, Western Environmental Law Center, and Willamette Riverkeeper.

SB 777 would modify Oregon's existing Wolf Depredation Compensation Program by:

- 1) Applying a multiplier of 7x the fair market value for the amount compensated for the loss or injury of certain livestock
- 2) Establishing a new ceiling of compensation of \$25,000 per livestock animal or working dog.

The Oregon Wildlife Coalition oppose SB 777 for the following reasons:

The multiplier does not "fix" any problems with the Compensation Program. Several issues with the Compensation Program have surfaced, and this bill does not address those issues. For example, there are inefficiencies in the Program, and it can take up to a year for compensation claims to be paid. Other states, such as Montana, have a State Livestock Board that can standardize and pay claims expeditiously. Some Oregon counties are challenged to stand up compensation committees, even though there are depredations in the county. Moreover, the multiplier, whether 7 or 5, is based on merely [one 2003 study](#) in an area of recurring wolf-livestock conflict in Idaho that does not appropriately reflect wolf-livestock conflict management in Oregon. Even in this high-conflict area, the study showed only 1 of 5 producers involved experienced losses (<5 calves total), and no proactive non-lethal tools to prevent livestock losses were documented. In Oregon, most producers also experienced no losses to wolves annually and are encouraged to use proactive non-lethal strategies, which reduce livestock losses further. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that most, if any, producers would experience up to 7 missing cattle to wolf depredation in a given year.

The vast majority of producers in Oregon will not have 5-7 missing livestock for every 1 confirmed or probable depredation – in fact, in 2023, [no missing livestock claims were fulfilled](#). Additionally, the multiplier being considered a proxy for indirect loss is problematic because indirect loss is rarely studied and no statewide study has been conducted in Oregon. Even if the assumption that indirect loss is occurring in Oregon is considered for a moment, there is no way to confirm these losses were caused by wolves, and not other environmental factors. Moreover, livestock producers who do not experience a

depredation, but may experience indirect loss, have no way to submit claims. These funds are better spent on expediting direct loss and non-lethal claims. Further, directing funds toward range riders and other strategic animal husbandry strategies will help producers reduce direct and indirect losses, keep regular tabs on livestock, and discover direct losses to due wolves and other causes.

The multiplier would be an outlier as compared to other Western States: Idaho and Montana have no multiplier, and Washington applies a 2x multiplier for allotments larger than 100 acres. Wyoming has a 7x multiplier for calves only, and that was based on the one and only research that looked at wolf depredations in a chronic wolf depredation area with no non-lethal deterrence. That situation is not reasonably analogous to what SB 777 modifies as the multiplier requires owners to have demonstrated the implementation of best management practices to deter wolves, including reasonable use of nonlethal methods when practicable in areas of known wolf activity.

The 7x or 5x multiplier and the new \$25,000 ceiling of compensation per depredation claim endanger the financial stability of the Depredation Program. In 2023, [the Oregon Department of Agriculture distributed](#) approximately \$475,000 to counties, with approximately \$70,000 to loss compensation and about \$400,000 to prevention. A 5x or 7x multiplier, applied to even a small portion of the losses, would significantly increase the amount of funds distributed by the Program going to compensation. That would either require a commensurate reduction in funds going to prevention or an increase in the amount of funding needed to support the Program. In a time of difficult and uncertain financial circumstances, this is surely not the moment to make an unnecessary change to a program and endanger its financial stability.

A better course of action is to resume the paused 2024 Compensation Working Group. After last year's multiplier bill failed to pass, several legislators created an ad hoc working group comprised of conservationists and livestock producers. That working group failed to proceed to the phase where both elements engaged in substantive discussions on an agreed-upon solution. The Oregon Wildlife Coalition believes a compromise solution is possible and is looking forward to restarting that conversation.

We urge you to reject SB 777 and its -1 amendment, and restart the Compensation Working Group.

*Bird Alliance of Oregon
Cascadia Wildlands
Defenders of Wildlife
Humane Society of the United States
Humane Voters Oregon*

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Willamette Riverkeeper*