Wildlife Advocates Oppose House Bill 3167

HB 3167 would continue a program of “predator damage control districts” to raise money for killing wildlife deemed a threat to private property. The above organizations and coalition strongly oppose this bill.

Background

HB 3167 would eliminate the January 2022 sunset on “predator damage control” districts. Authorized by HB 3188 (2015), the districts are government entities that raise money “for the purpose of funding county services to prevent, reduce and mitigate damage to property from predatory animals.” (Section 2(1)(a), chapter 650, Oregon Laws 2015 (full text posted in testimony on OLIS).) “Predatory animals” include bears, bobcats, red foxes, cougars, “fur-bearing mammals” (including beavers), gray wolves, coyotes, rabbits and “rodents.” (Section 1(6), chapter 650, Oregon Laws 2015; ORS 497.655; ORS 610.002; and cross-references therein.) The districts assess charges against owners of 10 or more acres of farm and/or forest land unless the owners affirmatively opt out. So far, two districts have been formed – one in Douglas County and one in Coos County. Others are being considered.

Reasons for Opposing the Bill

The Money Goes to “Wildlife Services.” In practice, money raised by the districts goes to counties for contracts with federal Wildlife Services – a highly controversial program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture that carries out “predator control” activities on public and private lands with poisoning, trapping, snaring, aerial gunning, and paid hunters. (See Exposed – USDA’s Secret War on Wildlife.) In the last fiscal year, Wildlife Services 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, and guns shot from airplanes and helicopters. (OLIS, Wildlife Services Data Reports 2019-2020, pp. 210-26.)

There Is No Requirement to Consider or Use Non-lethal Measures When Appropriate. HB 3167 includes an amendment that allows use of district funds for non-lethal measures to address wildlife damage. However, despite requests from wildlife advocates, HB 3167 does not include any requirement that recipients of district funds actually consider or use non-lethal methods when appropriate (in addition to lethal methods if necessary). Our information from people close

1 The Oregon Wildlife Coalition consists of Cascadia Wildlands, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, the Humane Society of the United States, Humane Voters Oregon, Oregon Wild, Portland Audubon, Western Environmental Law Center and WildEarth Guardians.
to the program is that Wildlife Services defaults to killing wildlife as the solution to human-wildlife conflicts.²

There Is No Report on Program Activities or Effectiveness. While a sunset suggests a program needs to prove itself to continue, proponents have not produced even the most basic report on the district program. Proponents have provided no information (other than anecdotal) on what problems the districts were formed to solve, what specific activities were funded, what animals were killed and how many, how much money was spent and on what, how residents were informed of the program and their right to opt out, how many landowners did opt out, or whether the program in fact reduced property damage caused by wildlife.

There Is No Requirement for Record-keeping and Disclosure. Despite requests from our coalition, HB 3167 does not include any requirement that the districts or their service providers keep records of their activities and make them readily available to the public. Wildlife Services reports its activities to the state by county, but the public generally does not know that or how to request the reports. Moreover, counties using district funds could use different providers in the future.

Contacts:

Brian Posewitz, Humane Voters Oregon, brian@humanevotersoregon.org
Samantha Bruegger, WildEarth Guardians, sbruegger@wildearthguardians.org
Sristi Kamal, Defenders of Wildlife, skamal@defenders.org

² Proponents say Wildlife Services does consider and uses non-lethal methods. If so, there should have been no problem putting that in the bill, but proponents resisted. The specific language wildlife advocates last proposed was: “A provider of predator damage control services receiving charges collected [through the districts] shall consider and implement when appropriate non-lethal methods for preventing, reducing, and mitigating damage from predatory animals.”