

**Big Wildlife - Cascadia Wildlands - Center for Biological Diversity - Defenders of Wildlife
Hells Canyon Preservation Council - KS Wild - NE Oregon Ecosystems - Oregon Chapter Sierra Club
Oregon Wild - Predator Defense - Wolf Education & Research Center - Wolf Recovery Foundation**

December 16, 2011

Governor Kitzhaber
160 State Capitol
900 Court Street
Salem, Oregon 97301-4047

Governor Kitzhaber,

On behalf of our thousands of members and supporters from all across Oregon, we write you today to express our strong concerns regarding the development of committees to review wolf compensation claims under the taxpayer-funded compensation legislation that passed earlier this year. It has been represented to the public by your office, and others, that these panels would be balanced and include at least two pro-wolf, pro-conservation voices. However, recent events in Wallowa County cast doubt upon this, and could set a terrible precedent for the abuse of taxpayer funds with other committees as they are set up throughout the state.

As you know, a sound compensation program could encourage wolf recovery and support for wildlife conservation among livestock interests by helping the industry readjust to living with wolves on the landscape and building bridges between stakeholders. However, an unsound plan could provide perverse incentives for bad animal husbandry, serve as a platform to legitimize anti-wolf activists, and turn into a permanent entitlement program.

Despite strong misgivings from a number of groups actively supporting Oregon wolf recovery, we have continued to engage constructively in the process it set forth in hopes of making the final program a success. Settling for anything less would be a disservice to Oregon taxpayers and the native wildlife they treasure as well as to responsible livestock operators. A particular concern to us is the makeup of the county committees. The negotiated legislation directed committees to include some reasonable semblance of balance and include at least two pro-wolf conservation voices.

On December 14th, nine days after the close of the public comment period, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) announced they had adopted a final set of rules to govern the compensation program, including the procedures for setting up local county committees to review claims. However, it has come to our attention that Wallowa County began finalizing their review committee well before ODA even finished the process of outlining the requirements for such committees. Worse, its initial composition included no pro-conservation voice whatsoever and seemed to contemplate the inclusion of quite the opposite. Though the committee may ultimately conform to the final rule, we fear the reverse has happened.

This is deeply concerning, as the precedent set in Wallowa County may form the model for committees throughout the state who will be charged with distributing taxpayer funds. It is not acceptable for Oregon taxpayer dollars to be used to provide a platform for anti-wildlife activists, or for those committees to use these monies to punish or reward particular livestock operations for their political positions. Recent reprisals against local businesses in Wallowa County perceived as too friendly with conservation interests provides ample evidence of the potential for the abuse, as have flawed programs in neighboring states.

The good news is that the local soil and water conservation district in Wallowa County (billed initially as one of the pro-wolf conservation voices) has declined to participate. This vacancy provides the county, ODA, and the Governor's Office an opportunity to do the right thing and ensure some balance is represented in the composition of this panel.

Governor Kitzhaber, at an absolute minimum, we strongly urge you to work with your staff, ODA, and the county to ensure at least one credible pro-wolf conservation voice is included in this panel. This would be in keeping with the representations made to Oregon taxpayers during the last legislative session, and with the values of the people of Oregon.

The return of wolves to Oregon is a great conservation success story and brings with it very real economic, ecological, and symbolic benefits to the state. To the extent it also brings a real, if small and localized, cost, we hope that a fair, balanced compensation program will offset that and help the livestock industry readjust to living with wolves on the landscape.

Very Sincerely,



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