

Farmers, hunters spar over elk damage bills

House bill covers Clatsop County

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Legislation aimed at reducing crop damage from elk has pitted Oregon agriculture groups against hunting organizations that say the proposals will allow for irresponsible killing.

The state House and Senate are considering bills under which the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife would issue tags with more flexible rules for killing elk that consume hay, trample fields and damage fences.

Proponents of House Bill 3227 and Senate Bill 301 argue that existing tools for managing elk damage have proven to be insufficient as populations of the ungulates have increased.

"It's like someone coming into your living room every month and saying, 'Give me 25% of your income,'" said state Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, chief sponsor of HB 3227.

The specifics of each proposal are different, but both would call for damage tags to be issued to "persons" rather than "landowners," which hunting organizations claim will greatly expand the field of people who qualify to kill elk.

"This bill will allow for the senseless killing of elk during times when elk are most vulnerable," said Fred Walasavage, board member of the Oregon Hunters Association.

HB 3227 would create an excessive elk damage pilot program for areas in Lincoln, Tillamook, Clatsop, Union, Morrow, Wallowa and Umatilla counties.

The Department of Fish



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
Oregon farmers and hunters disagree about two bills aimed at reducing elk damage by changing tag requirements.

and Wildlife would sell pilot program tags to people who complain of excessive elk damage, which would include not only landowners but also people who lease property or shareholders of an entity that rents or owns property.

The tags would apply only to antlerless elk but there would be no limit on the number of tags per person or a minimum acreage requirement to participate in the pilot program.

The original version of HB 3227 would allow the use of artificial lights to spot elk at night but a proposed amendment would remove that provision.

Under SB 301, the Department of Fish and Wildlife would be directed to consider elk overpopulation when issuing tags under an existing landowner damage tag program. The bill would also allow such tags to be used by "persons" rather than strictly by "landowners."

Two other bills introduced in the Senate that dealt with elk damage have died in committee because they weren't scheduled for a work session by Friday's legislative deadline.

Supporters of the surviving bills argue that current laws and programs intended to help landowners are insufficient to keep pace with the damage caused by elk.

"Hazing runs elk to your neighbors, fencing slows them down," said Dan Leuthold, a farmer in Tillamook County.

Elk damage is a serious threat to the financial stability of Oregon farmers and could lead to the conversion of land to "ranchettes" if agriculture isn't profitable, said Mark Owens, an alfalfa grower and Harney County commissioner.

"It's preservation. It's not a hunting bill," Owens said of HB 3227.

Representatives of the Oregon Hunters Association, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Oregon Bow Hunters told lawmakers the proposals went too far in relaxing tag restrictions.

Members of a hunting club, for example, could lease a small parcel under HB 3227 and make the case for receiving limitless pilot program tags, said Paul Donheffner, a board member of the Oregon Hunters Association.

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Sancy Leachman, M.D., Ph.D., is a physician-scientist who chairs the Department of Dermatology at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) and is the director of the Melanoma Research Program at the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute, an NCI-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center. She is a dermatologist using basic science research and state-of-the-art technology to combat skin cancer.

When not working, Leachman spends time with her husband and two children in outdoor pursuits including hiking, skiing, backpacking and exploring the Pacific Northwest.



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