

Barreto accused of misleading on wolf bill

Two other lawmakers named in ethics complaint

By George Plaven
East Oregonian

The environmental group Cascadia Wildlands is accusing three Oregon lawmakers, including Rep. Greg Barreto, of knowingly misrepresenting a bill that ratified the state’s decision to remove gray wolves from the endangered species list.

Barreto, a Republican from Cove, introduced House Bill 4040 during the short legislative session earlier this year. The Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife had previously determined wolves no longer need endangered species protections, and the Fish and Wildlife Commission followed through with delisting wolves in November 2015. HB 4040 effectively gave the Legislature’s stamp of approval, and Gov. Kate Brown signed off on the bill in March.

But in order to secure votes for the bill, Cascadia Wildlands argues Barreto — along with Reps. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, and Sal Esquivel, R-Medford — made false statements that HB 4040 would not affect a judicial review of the wolf delisting decision. Nick Cady, the legal director for the organization, filed an ethics complaint Monday against the representatives.

“There’s a real concern this bill passed through the House with a fundamental misunderstanding of what it does,” Cady said. “Salem can be somewhat of a black box.



Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, introduces himself to the rest of the Education Committee during a meeting on the first day of the 2015 Oregon Legislative Session in Salem.

... We perceived this as pretty egregious.”

Cascadia Wildlands, Oregon Wild and the Center for Biological Diversity had all requested a judicial review of the delisting decision. The case was tossed by the Oregon Court of Appeals on April 22, which cited HB 4040. Cady claims the bill’s sole purpose was to block their review, despite claims from Barreto, Witt and Esquivel.

According to the complaint, Barreto said during a Feb. 4 hearing that the bill “does nothing more than shore up the decision by the Fish and Wildlife Commission,” and “Our objective in this is not to usurp the author-

ity of the commission. It is only to shore up the decision that they have made and to make the (wolf) plan a workable plan as was written.” He also sent a written document to colleagues stating the bill had no language precluding judicial review.

However, on Feb. 16, the Legislative Counsel Committee issued a report to Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, stating that the only legal effect of HB 4040 was to “validate any real or perceived irregularities” in ODFW’s decision under state law.

“In essence, the only effect of the bill was to preclude judicial review of the commission’s delisting decision,” the complaint reads.

HB 4040 passed the House 33-23, and the Senate 17-11. Since then, ODFW shot and killed four wolves from the Imnaha Pack in northeast Oregon for frequently attacking livestock in the area.

There is still no legal hunting of wolves allowed in Oregon.

Barreto said he had not seen the complaint as of Monday morning, but reiterated the intent of the bill was to affirm what ODFW had already done.

“All we did was say yes, we agree with Fish and Wildlife,” Barreto said. “If that precludes their lawsuit, then so be it.”

Rep. Esquivel also said that he had not received a copy of the complaint, but was not worried about it because he did nothing wrong.

“We didn’t intentionally try to mislead anyone,” Esquivel said. “It’s our opinion, and our opinion’s our opinion.”

Witt also said on Monday afternoon that Cady’s allegations were baseless, and that lawmakers fully vetted the legislation during the last two annual legislative sessions.

“It said, in essence, that the procedures (ODFW) undertook in making the determination to delist were adequate and sufficient,” Witt said. “But we didn’t make any determination beyond that. It would have been inappropriate for us to have done so.”

Environmentalists had

asked for a review of the delisting decision because they argued it was not made with sound science, and had not been independently reviewed, as required by state law.

Cady said they are pushing to have the case reconsidered by the Court of Appeals.

“To be very clear, the (wolf) recovery is going very successfully,” he said. “Our

frustration is more just the pushback this species’ recovery is getting from state legislators and various lobbying interests.”

Oregon’s wolf population had grown to at least 110 animals by the end of 2015, a 36 percent increase over the previous year.

Capital Bureau Reporter Hillary Borrud contributed to this report.

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In the poll of likely Multnomah County voters, 69 percent agreed that Congress should get a voice in the decision.

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Bridge move to force Highway 82 delays

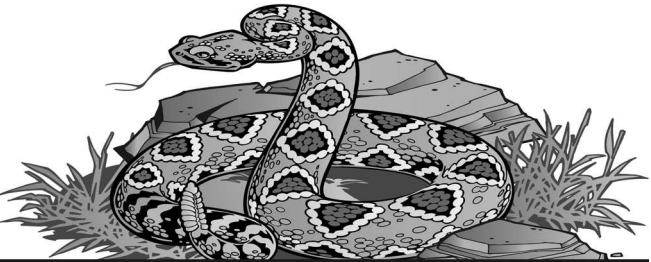
Wallowa County Chieftain

The Oregon Department of Transportation is warning Wallowa County drivers that they may experience delays along Highway 82 near Minam either Tuesday or Wednesday (May 10-11) as crews move the Deer Creek Road bridge (crossing the Wallowa River) to Wallowa.

ODOT Public Information Officer Tom Strandberg said Tuesday that the exact day of the move is yet to be determined and that crews likely will move parts of the bridge in two separate trips, with a stop for traffic relief each time at the Minam truck scales. Transport of the bridge parts will require the use of both lanes of the highway and motorists should expect up

to a 20-minute delay during transport.

The 100-year-old Deer Creek Bridge is scheduled for replacement. The existing bridge — 20 feet wide and 110 feet long — will be installed as a footbridge crossing the Wallowa River, connecting Wallowa Union Railroad property to the Nez Perce Tribe’s Tamkaliks grounds.



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