



Working Together to Promote Resource Conservation And Economic Stability in the Coquille Watershed

The Honorable Senator Chris Edwards, Co-Chair
The Honorable Representative Ben Unger, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
Oregon State Capitol
Room H-178
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

RE: Public Testimony In Support Of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Programs

We are pleased to have the opportunity to provide testimony in hearty support of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife programs, staff and grant opportunities. The Coquille Watershed Association (CWA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the health and sustainability of the Coquille watershed in southwestern Oregon and we have been working with ODFW since our inception in 1994.

When Oregon coastal wild/natural coho salmon populations reached their lowest recorded abundance in the early 1990's, the State of Oregon developed The Oregon Plan to provide the framework for recovering this species. The Oregon Plan is recognition that Oregon's coastal watersheds have been impacted by human activity over the past 150 years and there are actions that can be implemented to recover the overall health of coastal watersheds. The Oregon Plan benefits a number of aquatic organisms including coho, fall Chinook and coastal cutthroat trout. These species bring millions of dollars in revenue to coastal communities annually through recreational and commercial fisheries, and continued recovery of wild/natural fish populations will further increase the economic benefits to the coastal regions.

The Oregon Plan calls on all individuals and organizations who utilize the coastal regions, such as state and local agencies, tribes, the forestry industry and agricultural & private landowners, to work towards coastal river and stream habitat recovery. At the forefront of watershed recovery are watershed councils and ODFW. The CWA, and nearly all of the 86 watershed councils in Oregon, rely heavily on the engagement and support of ODFW staff and funding to implement habitat restoration projects. Watershed councils are mostly smaller organizations, many with a one-person staff, and can utilize everything ODFW has to offer, including valuable design and technical assistance, pre- and post-project monitoring, fish salvage, project implementation, coordination with private and public organizations and agencies, biological assessments and grant funding for projects. One of the more important aspects of watershed health that ODFW is involved with is biological assessment. Through the assessment of proposed individual projects, ODFW biologists are able to give direct guidance on where monies should be spent to maximize benefits to the watershed, what materials will best accomplish the stream restoration, and what quantity of positive impact the project is likely to have. The CWA is also actively engaged in conservation and strategic planning with ODFW, and their input is critical to the South Fork Action Plan we are currently composing and the updating of the Coquille Watershed Action Plan, version 3, that we will embark upon in 2014.

The CWA's core priorities align with ODFW's mission "To protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations", and we strive with ODFW to implement projects that have biological integrity and utilize local labor and resources in our "Headlands to Ocean" restoration program. We work with ODFW to create and sustain vibrant fishing communities through implementation of projects that enhance aquatic habitats and improve water quality, and with ODFW's help, we support family farms by assisting with irrigation, erosion and management practices that will improve their lands



and the health of the watershed. Our first stop on any project is the ODFW Field Office in Charleston, part of the Umpqua Watershed District in Roseburg. The staff in the Charleston office works with us on a daily basis and we work with biologists in Salem and Roseburg closely on each of our projects. The assistance and funding we receive from ODFW are two of our main sources of non-federal in-kind/matching funds, and this enables us to leverage more federal and private funding than we would be able to obtain on our own.

For one recent, multi-year large wood project, the CWA partnered with ODFW and others to restore and improve 13.72 miles of instream habitat in the North Fork Coquille River watershed through the placement of large wood to replicate natural structures found in properly functioning streams. The CWA, ODFW and partners were then awarded the *2010 Award of Excellence in Riparian Management* from The American Fisheries Society for our work and achievements in the North Fork Coquille project. This award is presented to conservation agencies for impressive on-the-ground accomplishments in riparian habitat management, and we were recognized for the stellar work that was, in large part, spearheaded by ODFW and implemented under ODFW guidance.

In addition to the technical, design, implementation and monitoring assistance we receive from ODFW, we are also fortunate to be the recipient of grant funds through different programs that ODFW offers. From a small, STAC-funded grant to help build a natural species center at a local high school to two large wetland-wildlife habitat projects funded through ODFW Research & Enhancement in just the last 2 years, these programs have brought awareness, education, collaboration and, most importantly, economic stimulus to Coos County through the creation of jobs, contracted services and purchase of locally-sourced materials.

A 2011 report from the University of Oregon's Institute for a Sustainable Environment titled "*The Economic Impacts of Oregon's South Coast Restoration Industry*", states that investments in restoration have benefited the South Coast economy by providing an average of 73 direct & indirect jobs per year over the last decade, and we have also seen increased productivity of forest and agricultural lands and healthier sport and sustenance fisheries. The report also states that fostering a resilient restoration industry will be a key economic driver for future growth, noting that ODFW estimates the total economic impact of the wild coho salmon sport fishing season on the Coquille River in 2011 amounted to more than \$2.1 million. It is essential that ODFW's programs remain robust as they offer vital support for everyone engaged in the restoration and enhancement of Oregon's natural habitats.

Recreational fisheries for wild coho salmon were re-opened in the Coos and Coquille River watersheds in 2009 after being closed for 16 years, and the fledgling recovery of coho & Chinook salmon populations is due to the efforts of those involved in on-the-ground watershed restoration. Improvements in watershed health are expected to increase recreational and commercial fishery income to coastal communities as salmon populations continue to recover, and, as vital components of the recovery, sustained investment in ODFW programs, staff and funding opportunities is crucial.

Please feel free to contact me if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,
Kelly

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