

**Independent
Multidisciplinary
Science Team
(IMST)**



State of Oregon

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The Honorable Chris Edwards
Senate Committee Environ. and Nat. Res.
State Capital Building
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chairman Edwards,

We, the current members of the Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team (IMST), would like to offer this written testimony for your Committee's upcoming March 18 consideration of Senate Bill 202 regarding independent science reviews. While we do not take a position on the merits of the bill (our Charter prevents us from taking a position on policy matters), we feel that our cumulative 40+ years of experience as Oregon's statutory independent natural resources science advisors provides a perspective that will be helpful in your deliberations.

In a nutshell, our advice can be boiled down to three suggestions: *1) don't reinvent the wheel, 2) fix the real problems, and 3) ensure the "independence" piece of independent science review.*

Don't reinvent the wheel. Any new legislation should build on the 18 years of experience Oregon already has with independent science review. When the IMST statute was enacted in 1997, the Governor's Natural Resources Office retained scientifically trained professional staff to develop the original foundation for the IMST, and a 7-member team of senior, practicing scientists spent a year developing an optimal review system. Over the next decade and a half the IMST has fine-tuned various parts of review processes. Most recently, a January 15, 2015 workshop produced a comprehensive report and specific recommendations (which were sent to your committee on March 3) for moving to the next iteration of independent science review. The workshop engaged some of the best experts available on this topic across Oregon, and it is not likely that anything significantly better would come from a whole new look.

Fix the real problems. This suggestion goes along with: if it's not broken, don't fix it. The main problems with the IMST model can be solved by a more timely and rigorous selection process for new members, by greater flexibility to bring in outside expertise as needed, and by increasing institutional communications among natural resources agencies and science advisors, as was the case when the Natural Resources Core Team was operational. Because the IMST has had a very strong charter and operating guidelines, the actual science review functions have worked well. The recommendations from the Jan. 15 workshop provide some

valuable ideas regarding team member selection and interaction with state natural resources agencies. Building on those recommendations would result in substantive improvements.

Independence. Independence is a critical criterion that should be firmly upheld in the proposed science review board. The IMST was established specifically as an independent entity, operating under the joint oversight of the appointing authorities (the Oregon Legislature and Governor). We have considerable documentation of numerous discussions about independence with agencies, legislators, and others, dating from the inception of the team. Independence has been at the forefront of our mission, and maintaining it has been one of the key successes of IMST. This understanding of independence and what it looks like in science review is critical to framing a new and improved model.

In discussions about science review, it is important to keep in mind the difference between impartiality and independence. Science review can be impartial under a wide spectrum of organizational structures, but it is only truly independent when it is free from oversight or guidance that is (or can be construed to be) subject to financial or political influence. The extent to which a science review organization can be free-standing (for example, not managed under a state agency, university or corporation, or not answering to a board of directors such as a non-profit) is a critical consideration, and has been the primary factor in the IMST maintaining credibility as an independent body.

We hope you find these comments helpful as you continue discussions about how best to provide independent natural resources science review for Oregon.

Sincerely,



Carl Schreck
Chair IMST



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