



Tillamook Estuaries Partnership
A National Estuary Project

613 Commercial Street, PO Box 493, Garibaldi, OR 97118

Phone (503) 322-2222 Fax (503) 322-2261

March 30, 2015

To: Co-Chairs Devlin and Rayfield and Members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

From: Lisa M. Phipps, Executive Director

Re: Support for the Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program (ODFW Budget)

Co-Chairs Devlin and Rayfield and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Tillamook Estuaries Partnership (TEP), I am writing in support of the Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program (WOSRP), which has been eliminated from the Governor's proposed agency budget for the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW). We recognize the difficult decisions that have been made to preserve core programs within ODFW's budget and urge your consideration of increased funding for the Agency to continue support of the WOSRP.

TEP is one of 28 National Estuary Programs in the country and Oregon is fortunate to have two of the 6 west coast programs. The National Estuary Program was created through Section 320 of the Clean Water Action. TEP is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that is committed to the restoration and conservation of Tillamook County's estuaries and watersheds....a mission that aligns well with ODFW's.

The WOSRP is an ODFW program that was started in the mid-1990's to address native fish habitat needs in Western Oregon. The program has focused on habitat restoration for native salmon and steelhead, and directly supports implementation of the *Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds*, as well as many of ODFW's species conservation and recovery plans. WOSRP biologists provide technical assistance, consultation, management, or construction services to many key partners – including watershed councils – that conduct on-the-ground fish and wildlife habitat restoration projects.

In August 2014, the ODFW Commission acknowledged the importance of the WOSRP by restoring \$1,000,000 back into the proposed budget by Staff. At that meeting, it was clear that the Commission recognized the paradox of expecting the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds, Coastal Multi-Species Conservation Plan, and the Oregon Conservation Strategy to be implemented at the local level without adequate support to ensure that projects were not only addressing the issues but protecting the State's interest in conservation of its many wonderful natural resources. With the upcoming NOAA federal recovery plan and delisting criteria for Coastal Coho, now more than ever, the state and local partners are going to need the expertise and guidance of ODFW.



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We support the WOSRP in its entirety. However, the primary focus of our comments will be on the North Coast as we can speak to the impacts that the loss of this program will have on our and our partners' efforts. The North Coast has been a shining example of moving successful projects forward, leveraging dollars from private, local, state, and federal partners, and showing measurable progress, whether in improved water quality or restored habitat functions. This work could not have been done as efficiently or as fiscally prudent without ODFW's input and expertise. Overall, from 2011 to 2013, WOSRP provided direct technical support to Watershed Councils and private landowners in western Oregon to implement Oregon Plan measures directing the restoration and enhancement of salmonid habitat in the region. This included projects to increase instream habitat complexity by adding large wood or boulders, enhancing riparian areas by protection or planting, and correcting fish passage problems. The program also monitored projects and completed 122.8 miles of habitat surveys to evaluate, and increase the effectiveness of, restoration projects. Along the Oregon coast alone, Tillamook, Newport, and Charleston offices each have a single biologist, and the Roseburg office has two biologists that conducted restoration activities in this ESU. These four office worked with 1,598 landowners or concerned citizens to review or develop 174 plans for restoration that encompassed 3,820 acres of habitat.

While under this proposed budget, the Department will be experiencing cuts (potentially as many as 70), the effects in North Coast are devastating. In 2014, the North Coast District (includes Tillamook and Newport) had 28.5FTE overall. Under this proposed budget, it will experience a loss of 11.5 FTE positions, a 40% reduction. The fisheries side of the program is even more dramatic. In 2014, there were 14 FTE's. Under this proposed budget, that number will be reduced 6 FTE, a 60% reduction.

These cuts will impact restoration and conservation efforts, increase costs of projects, reduce leveraging opportunities, eliminate valuable match dollars, and effectively reduce the State's ability to implement the critical restoration and conservation strategies that have been a cornerstone of Oregon's image throughout the Nation.

As I read this letter, I recognize that it sounds dramatic. Simply put, it is dramatic. Not only are we losing the WOSRP, whose many benefits are described above, but we are also losing the Habitat Conservation Biologist program which provides technical assistance/consultation for State/Federal agencies, local governments, watershed councils, and landowners on protection, enhancement, and restoration of fish and wildlife habitats. These program-funded positions are located in Corvallis, Roseburg and Tillamook, where future growth and resource conflicts will likely be the greatest. The program biologists cover a wide range of land use activities. They review and provide comments on the permits or regulatory actions of other agencies that affect fish, wildlife, and their habitat. Funding of these positions assists with critical elements of the Oregon



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Plan by helping ensure sustainable development while minimizing, mitigating, or eliminating negative impacts to fish and wildlife habitat. The loss of these positions will be felt throughout the regulatory realm as permitting processes are delayed or implemented without the full benefit of the ODFW input potentially resulting lost development opportunities or poorly implemented development opportunities. For perspective, during 2011-2013, the habitat conservation biologists reviewed 1,018 permits and conducted over 816 site visits on land use activities.

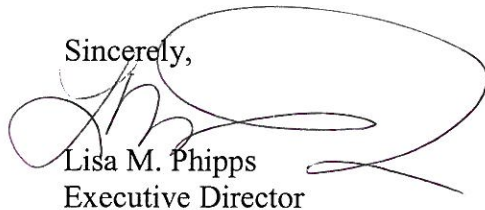
While we ask that you consider funding both of these programs, we are also aware of the many tough decisions that need to be made during this process.

We strongly encourage you to support an agency budget that includes funding for the Western Oregon Stream Restoration program and restore at least the \$1,000,000.00 that was recommended by the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at 503-322-2222 or by email at lphipps@tbnep.org

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa M. Phipps', is written over a large, light-colored oval shape. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lisa M. Phipps
Executive Director