



## MEMORANDUM

TO: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Natural Resources  
FROM: Quinn Read, Wildlife Coordinator, Oregon Wild  
DATE: April 2, 2015  
RE: SB 5511 -- Relating to the financial administration of the State Department of Fish and Wildlife; declaring an emergency.

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On behalf of Oregon Wild's 15,000 members and supporters from across Oregon, we would like to thank you for scheduling this important public hearing on SB 5511 to appropriate General Fund dollars to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for certain biennial expenses. Oregon Wild's mission is to protect and restore Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and water as an enduring legacy for all Oregonians. Oregon Wild is part of a coalition of conservation organizations working to help ODFW address its current budget shortfall and long-term financial stability. We respectfully submit the following comments for consideration and incorporation into the record.

ODFW's current budget shortfall reflects a long-term downward trend in funding for the agency. To date, ODFW has relied largely on revenues from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. Over the last two decades, public participation in consumptive uses of fish and wildlife has steadily declined. With less money from license fees and few alternative sources of revenue, ODFW's budget has suffered -- and the gap will only continue to grow. This puts the agency in the unenviable position of raising license fees for hunters and anglers, cutting programs, and asking the public to support the use of general fund dollars for the agency without a commitment to non-game wildlife conservation.

To help ODFW address its budget deficit and to ensure long-term financial sustainability, Oregon Wild is working with a coalition of conservation, hunting and fishing groups to identify proactive solutions for this legislative session and beyond. In the long-term, a diversified revenue base is critical to help the agency achieve financial stability. In the short-term, the proposed General Fund allocation and associated fee increases can help the agency resolve its current budget shortfall while setting the stage for positive reform in the years to come.

In accordance with ODFW's broad conservation mission, we believe that the General Fund allocation sought by the agency in SB 5511 should be tied to programs that benefit the public at large. Oregon Wild endorses an approach that allocates General Fund dollars only to programs that cannot otherwise access funds from hunting and fishing license revenues. Such an approach ensures that the public's interest in all of Oregon's native wildlife -- not just species that can be hunted or fished -- will be protected for generations to come.

Oregon Wild supports:

- The allocation of General Fund dollars for programs that benefit the public at large, are in accordance with ODFW's broad conservation mission, and that cannot otherwise access

dollars from hunting and fishing license revenues.

- Maintaining the positions necessary to implement the Integrated Water Strategy, the Oregon Conservation Strategy, and the Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program.
- Funding and implementing the Oregon Conservation Strategy, including protection and conservation of non-game species and their habitats.
- Shifting existing General Fund investments in the base budget from programs that benefit only specific user groups to programs that benefit the public at large. For example, \$8.428 million of general funds are currently spent on hatchery management (\$4.8 million GF), fish screens (\$2 million GF), engineering (\$1.2 million GF), and Wildlife Services (.428 million GF). These programs should be evaluated to see if they are more appropriately funded with license and fee revenues.
- POP 101, funding a portion of several dozen field positions with General Fund dollars. This reflects the on-the-ground reality that many field staff spend time on issues not directly related to hunting and fishing.
- POP 102, allocating dollars from the proposed hunting and fishing license fee increase to pay for programs that directly support hunting and fishing. If the proposed fee increases are not approved, the department should focus reductions on the programs that benefit those user groups, and protect programs that benefit the public interest and support the agency's conservation mission.
- With respect to the related General Fund request by the Oregon State Patrol, funding 17 fish and wildlife enforcement officers that are currently paid for through hunting and fishing license revenues. These officers do much more than just fish and wildlife enforcement, and a General Fund investment in these positions benefits the public at large.

With support from the Oregon Legislature, we believe that ODFW could be one of the West's premier fish and wildlife management agencies -- one that is financially stable and fully empowered to implement its conservation mission.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these issues.