



April 2, 2015

Rep. Dan Rayfield, Co-Chair
Sen. Richard Devlin, Co-Chair
Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

Co-Chairs Rayfield and Devlin and members of the subcommittee,

The Oregon Conservation Network is a coalition of over forty organizations - along with the hundreds of thousands of Oregonians who are members of those organizations - working to protect Oregon's natural legacy. Together, we identify priorities each year. In 2015, reforming the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is one of our Priorities for a Healthy Oregon.

It is increasingly clear that the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is saddled with an unsustainable business model that compromises its existing and future conservation programs. We believe that the Legislature can help ODFW address its unprecedented budget shortfall, and set the groundwork for a long-term plan to make the agency functional, whole, stable, and accountable to the public for fulfilling its broad conservation mission to "...protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations."

Many members of the Oregon Conservation Network serve on the agency's External Budget Advisory Committee (EBAC), as well as on a work group set up by Chair Witt and the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources. We have been part of robust and thorough conversations about the future of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. This biennium's budget will not resolve the overall problems that they agency is experiencing, but it can begin to right the ship.

Specifically related to SB 5511 and the ODFW 2015-17 budget, we offer the following observations and requests:

- As a general rule, all general fund dollars supporting the work of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife should be spent on programs that benefit that public as a whole. While we believe that the 2015-2017 Policy Option Packages succeed in meeting that standard, we actually think some attention should be paid to the base budget in order for it to also follow suit. \$8.428 million of general funds go toward 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 reviewed to see if they are more appropriately funded with license and fee revenues.
- Please support POP 101, which provides general fund for a variety of needed staff. For example, the water quality/quantity program, which benefits all Oregonians, will be 100% general fund under this proposal. Without POP 101, Oregon will lose 25% of its fish biologists. These on-the-ground field staff are crucial to carrying out work important to the public.
- Please add back one Natural Resource Specialist 2 and two EBA Seasonal Assistant Instream Flow Specialists, who carry out the instream studies crucial to the Integrated Water Resources Strategy (\$201,142).

- We think that POP 104, which would support anadromous fish reintroduction in Klamath Basin following federal action, is premature. There is no agreement and none on the immediate horizon. The \$200,000 in POP 104 would be best directed to preventing cuts to field staff.
- Support POP 112, but we encourage the Legislature to add back, or at least partially add back, the Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program (\$2.1 million). Watershed councils and the watersheds they serve benefit greatly from the work of the “Westerns.” Without these positions, watershed councils will have to contract out for stream restoration projects at much higher cost.
- Add back POP 122 from the agency budget, which would fund work around the Oregon Conservation Strategy. We have spent – and continue to spend - resources to draft and now revise the Oregon Conservation Strategy. We absolutely need to fund implementation as well.
- Support POP 127, which supports fish ladder repairs.
- Support POP 128, which deals with Lower Deschutes ranch land.

We also encourage this subcommittee and the Legislature to support the following bills related to reforming the agency budget:

- SB 247 - Adopt the proposed license and fee increases as they make up one leg of the three-part stool necessary to support ODFW given their current fiscal crisis.
- HB 3315 – Create a pilot project that allows ODFW to track the services they provide to other agencies without any payment, and which may lead to a fee-for-service model to reimburse the agency for its work relating to other agency permits.
- HB 2401 - Institute a wild bird conservation fee and a brand tax in order to create a revenue stream to support the agency’s work on sage grouse and wild bird conservation.

Finally, it is critical that the Oregon State Police budget include \$5 million general fund toward fish and wildlife enforcement. While this was included in the Governor’s Recommended Budget, it was not included in the Co-Chairs’ Framework.

Thank you for your consideration,



Christy Splitt
Coordinator, Oregon Conservation Network