



Date: April 2, 2015

From: Audubon Society of Portland

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Re: SB 5511 Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget

Dear Co-chair Devlin, Co-Chair Buckley and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Audubon Society of Portland promotes the enjoyment, understanding and protection of nature across Oregon. One of our top priorities is ensuring adequate funding for Oregon's natural resource agencies. On behalf of our 15,000 members in Oregon, we would like to submit the following comments regarding SB 5511, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife budget has long been in need new and innovative approaches. The Department's overdependence on hunting and fishing fees and lack of other revenue streams has resulted in a situation in which the agency has faced ongoing reductions in critical wildlife programs, has been unable to reach out and build effective relationships with new and diverse constituencies, and in which many priority species receive little or no attention. In particular we are concerned about non-game species which represent 88% of the wildlife species in Oregon but currently receive less than 2% of the ODFW budget. The result of the current situation is that Oregon is often not able to proactively address species declines until it is forced to do so by the threat of a federal listing under the Endangered Species Act and ODFW is unable to build the types of relationships and partnerships that would allow it to build a much more robust funding base. ODFW needs both a short-term boost in funding to stabilize the agency as well as a longer-term plan to build a more robust and sustainable funding model that serves both the diversity of wildlife and the diversity of people in the State of Oregon.

SB 5511 represents a step in the right direction. Audubon Society of Portland supports a large infusion of general fund dollars into the department. We believe that a strong general fund component for the ODFW budget is both essential and appropriate. However, we would also urge the legislature to utilize general fund dollars specifically for programs for non-game wildlife species. Hunting and fishing fees already provide a direct revenue stream to provide programs specifically focused on game species. We believe that general fund dollars would best be focused on conservation programs that benefit all Oregonians and on the 88% of Oregon's wildlife that are not hunted or fished, and which currently have little or no revenue streams devoted to their protection.

We also urge the legislature to consider other potential new sources of revenue in addition to the general fund that would allow a broader array of Oregonians to contribute to ODFW wildlife programs. During this session the legislature will consider bills promoting a wildlife license plate, a tax on birdseed and a branding fee all of which would help fund ODFW wildlife programs. While none of these bills individually solve the long-term challenges of the agency, each represents the type of steps that will need to be taken in order to build a more robust and diverse funding base and better distribute agency costs among all Oregonians who care about wildlife.

Audubon supports the specific Oregon Conservation Network (OCN) recommendations regarding SB 5511. Specifically we support the following:

- ODFW is facing a growing budget shortfall due to declining revenues derived from license sales to consumptive users of fish and wildlife in the past. This dependence on license revenues has let the agency to prioritize consumptive use over its broader conservation mission which has undercut trust and support among the Oregon public. We strongly support the restoration and improvement of conservation programs at ODFW and any new or existing general fund investment should go toward conservation.
- The legislature should look for additional funding alternatives that support ODFW's nongame management including wildlife license plates and a tax on birdseed.
- Support for fish biologists and assistant biologists who provide fish management and instream flow data.
- Support and fully fund the water quality and quantity instream flow program.
- Support research, implementation and management of Oregon's marine reserves and safeguard Oregon's marine protected and seabird protected areas.
- Support and add back three positions 1 NRS(natural resources specialists) & 2 EVA (Assistant Instream flow specialists) costing \$200,000 (POP 101). These positions are essential for instream studies under the Integrated Water Resources Strategy but were left out of the GRB.
- Add back Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program, \$2.1 million in current budget, program needs \$1 million minimum.
- Add back position in director's office supporting Wildlife Diversity Strategy.
- Support License fees and general fund increases as a package deal to resolve the agency's budget shortfall. Support general fund dollars that benefit the general public and license fees supporting those programs.
- Reduce funding for predator control.

Audubon also supports POP 102 which would raise hunting and fishing fees. Should these fee increases not be fully or partially adopted, the associated cuts should go directly toward programs that directly benefit hunters and anglers. Programs that provide broad public benefit and conservation of non-game species should not be reduced if fee increases are not approved.

Finally Audubon supports the policy package option that would provide general fund support for 17 State Police fish and wildlife enforcement officers, that are currently supported via license revenue. These officers provide services that go beyond fish and wildlife related enforcement and the positions are more appropriately funded via the general fund.

Audubon believes that SB 5511 represents an important opportunity to begin to set ODFW on a path toward fiscal health that will allow it to better meet its mandate to protect and conserve all of Oregon's wildlife and to serve the broad interests of all Oregonians.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Respectfully,



Bob Sallinger  
Conservation Director  
Audubon Society of Portland