

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
April 16, 2015

Testimony in support of HB 3529

Establishes Wildlife Public Education Advisory Council to advise State Fish and Wildlife Director on public education about wildlife

Good morning Chair Witt and Committee Members my name is Stan Steele, and I am proud to say that I am a hunter, angler, trapper and recreational shooter. In today's world my community is a very small component of a greater society that many claim has lost touch with nature. If this assertion is true, then the conservation of our fish and wildlife resources is in peril.

Four years ago, a small group of outdoor enthusiasts and businesses who call Oregon home came together and decided to do everything possible to reverse the decline in hunter, angler and trapper participation. The Oregon Outdoor Council was born and has grown into well-respected, grass-roots, politically active conservation organization. We believe we have had a positive impact on protecting the future of our nature connected heritage sports and significantly contributed to the conservation of Oregon's rich array of wildlife, or as we like to say, everything from butterflies to bulls!

This Committee is acutely aware of the current financial crisis the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and extremely important wildlife conservation programs are currently facing and so are we. Numerous bills in the legislature are all trying to identify the cause of the financial woes and everything from hefty license and tag fee increases to increased general fund tax dollar allocations are being considered. These are all important issues, but we think that the major piece of the puzzle is being missed by many involved in this discussion.

Most Oregonians do not know who or what the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is or does. Ask your neighbor or your child's classroom teacher what ODFW stands for and most, if not all, will look at you with a deer in the headlights stare. They either simply don't know about the incredible work being done daily by our wildlife professionals or the priceless recreational opportunities available to them in Oregon. This alarms most sportsmen and sportswomen and what concerns us the most, are they don't have a clue about who provides the vast majority of the funding for our fish and wildlife conservation programs. It would be a gross understatement to say that this fact is not extremely problematic to the future of wildlife conservation and the quality of life we all enjoy as Oregonians.

Most professional fish and wildlife biologists heartily agree they are scientists not Public Relations or Humane Dimension experts. They also readily agree that due to past budgetary constraints they have not done a good job of educating the non-hunting, fishing, trapping or shooting public about the conservation benefits provided by those who do choose to participate in the heritage sports.

Public education about the financial role that hunting, fishing, trapping and recreational shooting has played for over 75 years to our nations wildlife conservation needs to happen now, not tomorrow, but today. We steadfastly believe that educating the non-hunting and non-angling public on the numerous benefits that sportsmen and sportswomen provide for conservation is one of the best ways to ensure stable agency funding and enhance the protection of our natural resources and the heritage sports far into the future. It is widely recognized that the heritage sports have been the cornerstone of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and although fewer Oregonians are choosing to participate,

they are none the less warmly perceived and accepted by most who understand the conservation connectivity they provide.

HB 3529 establishes a natural resource educational outreach program that will most assuredly provide the general public with a better understanding of Oregon's conservation mission and what it really means to be a hunter, angler, trapper or shooter. The bill is not an Oregon idea but rather it follows the blueprint that was utilized by sportsmen and sportswomen in Colorado in the late 1990's, Michigan in 2014 and is being considered today by you and your counterparts in Nevada. HB 3529 is our attempt to "Oregonize" what we think is a vital component, or the missing link that ensures the future of professional wildlife management and our outdoor connected lifestyles.

The Oregon Outdoor Council urges the committee to pass what we think is one of the most important pieces of conservation legislation under consideration by the 78th Oregon Legislative Assembly.

HB 3529 has the ability to be a game changer.

Keep Oregon Hunting, Fishing, Trapping and Recreationally Shooting,

Stan Steele, Chairman of the Board
Oregon Outdoor Council