



Oregon

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March 23, 2017

**To: The Honorable Brian Clem, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources**



**House Bill 2784 and House Bill 3234
Shannon Hurn, Deputy Director for Fish and Wildlife Programs
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Good afternoon Chair Clem and members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss House Bills 2784 and 3234 with you today. The Department is neutral on both bills. Both of these bills include proposed legislation and appropriations in support of a series of detailed recommendations offered by the Oregon Shellfish Task Force. Their recommendations are broadly designed to provide Oregonians with a wide variety of benefits regarding enhancement of aquaculture production, increased opportunities for recreational and commercial harvests, and conservation of molluscan shellfish resources. For the purpose of these bills the terms “shellfish” and “molluscan shellfish” are used to indicate clams, oysters, mussels, and abalone.

Molluscan shellfish play an important role in the history and culture of the Oregon coast. Oysters, razor clams, bay clams, mussels, and abalone are all highly prized by growers, recreational gatherers, and commercial harvesters. Oregonians have a long tradition getting up before dawn to dig for razor clams along our beaches and to gather bay clams from our bays and estuaries. Commercial clambers harvest a variety of bay clams and razor clams for human consumption and for crab bait. Farmed oysters cultivated in Oregon bays and estuaries are enjoyed throughout the state and shipped out to restaurants and retail outlets around the world. The Whiskey Creek Shellfish Hatchery, located in Netarts Bay, is recognized as a world leader in producing oyster seed and for their advancements in shellfish science and technology related to ocean acidification, and they regularly generate and ship out batches of microscopic larvae that serve as the broodstock for many commercial oyster growing operations in the United States. And the scientific research carried out by the Oregon Molluscan Broodstock Program is essential to generate new stocks and lineages of oysters that grow quickly, have high economic value, and have the potential to resist and adapt to the detrimental effects from ocean acidification.

An earlier economic analysis conducted by ODFW in 2008 estimated that about 175,000 to 190,000 Oregonians and visitors from out-of-state regularly participate each year in the recreational harvest of clams and crab along the northern and central regions of the Oregon coast. Survey data indicate that they make about 480,000 trips each year to the shoreline to

gather the crab and clams. These recreational trips are associated with about \$38 million in annual, direct and indirect expenditures. In addition, commercial mariculture of oysters is estimated to have an annual, direct economic value of about \$10.6 million each year in Oregon, and commercial clambers generate about \$500,000 annually from the harvest of bay clams and razor clams from Oregon waters. These previous estimates make it clear that the cultivation and gathering of shellfish provides great value to Oregon's coastal economies.

It is also clear that the earlier economic estimates are now nearly a decade out-of-date. In addition, the analysis of recreational shellfish harvests did not distinguish between sport collections of crab and clams, and the surveys did not extend to the southern region of the Oregon coast. It is possible that the collecting habits and spending patterns of resident Oregonians and visitors have changed over the past decade, and that the economic valuation of the trips and market conditions have also shifted. It would be beneficial for Oregon to conduct new socioeconomic surveys and develop updated and more accurate understandings of the economic value of cultivated oysters and wild stocks of clams, mussels state-wide along the Oregon coast.

Multiple agencies and programs have regulatory authority and jurisdiction for oversight and management of molluscan shellfish resources in Oregon. For example, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife – Marine Resources Program routinely monitors the activity levels, catch, and landings by the recreational and commercial fisheries, and they establish and periodically review the agency regulations regarding species that may be taken. ODFW also conducts fishery-independent surveys to assess the status, condition, and biomass of bay clams and razor clams, and these data are used to make adjustments to the harvest regulations. ODFW also conducts a diverse variety of public education and outreach activities designed to increase the appreciation and awareness about shellfish harvest opportunities. These activities include production of signs, web-sites, brochures, and ID cards, as well as public presentations, “how-to” workshops, and our popular touch-tank and displays each year at festivals along the coast and at the State Fair.

Concurrently, the Oregon Department of Agriculture – Food Safety Program provides regulatory oversight for management of the commercial shellfish growing operations and commercial harvest in state-owned waters that are approved for human consumption, and for the vitally important monitoring of marine biotoxins in shellfish tissues to ensure that oyster, clams, mussels, and crab are safe to eat. The Oregon State Police has responsibilities for enforcement of the shellfish regulations, and for prosecution of violations. Other agencies, such as the Oregon Department of State Lands, the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, the Oregon department of Environmental Quality, and Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, also have more limited jurisdiction over aspects of shellfish growing and harvest in Oregon.

Although the combined effort by the multiple state agencies to manage Oregon's shellfish resources is currently considerable and largely effective, there are still have room for improvements. And in many cases, additional personnel and financial resources are needed to make the administrative adjustments and program improvements needed to enhance aquaculture production, increase opportunities for recreational and commercial harvests, and ensure the conservation of Oregon's valuable molluscan shellfish resources.

In 2015 and 2016, the Oregon Shellfish Task Force developed their consensus report containing 32 detailed recommendations about steps that could be taken to improve and enhance the management of molluscan shellfish in Oregon. Their recommendations were placed in the context of a “*Pathway toward an Oregon Shellfish Initiative.*” House Bills 2784 and 3234 now encompass the entirety of those recommendations, and they take the next step forward along that path to specifically identify the priority program improvements and enhancement activities. More specifically, the many provisions included in the bills are collectively designed to help enhance the commercial production of cultivated shellfish, increase economic benefits to coastal communities, increase opportunities for recreational and commercial harvests, and to conserve, protect, and enhance our stocks of wild shellfish for the benefits of current and future Oregonians.

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