



**OREGON
WILD**

Protecting Oregon's wildlands, wildlife, and waters since 1974.

www.oregonwild.org

Oregon State Legislature
Oregon State Capitol
Joint Committee on Ways and Means- Subcommittee on Natural Resources
900 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

March 29, 2017

Sent via email to:
Matt Stayner
Julie Jensen

Oregon Wild Written Testimony Re: ODFW Budget 2017-2019

Chairman Frederick, Chairman Witt, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Danielle Moser and I am the Wildlife Coordinator for Oregon Wild.
I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) budget for 2017-2019.

Oregon Wild represents nearly 20,000 Oregonians across the state who value protecting and enhancing all fish and wildlife for enjoyment, recreation, and conservation benefit. Our members include hikers, wildlife photographers, bird watchers, anglers, and hunters; all who believe that a healthy ecosystem full of abundant fish, thriving native wildlife populations, and biologically diverse habitat, is critical to ensuring our natural heritage.

We recognize and believe ODFW's work is vital to all Oregonians who value fish and wildlife conservation. For example, their instrumental role in returning bighorn sheep to the landscape illustrates the agency's fortitude to pursue proactive species recovery. Similarly, ODFW's collaboration with the Oregon Zoo and their captive breeding program to foster the recovery of the western pond turtle in Oregon is a program worth celebrating and replicating for other threatened species. Conservation programs, when adequately staffed, supported, and funded, can turn broad public values into actionable solutions for Oregon's fish and wildlife.

However, as ODFW is currently funded and structured, vital programs to protect and restore non-game species of fish and wildlife are woefully underfunded and understaffed. Reporting by Oregon Public Broadcasting last November determined that the ODFW staff responsible for conserving Oregon's 600 non-game wildlife species — or roughly 88 percent of all species in the state — receives about 2 percent of the department's total budget. While we support some of the proposed cuts to wasteful programs, such as \$470,140 for Wildlife Services' animal trapping and poisoning program, we fear cuts in non-game species conservation, basic science, and water quality protection, which will further erode Oregon's ability to protect our fish and wildlife heritage.

Oregon Wild was founded in 1974 by a coalition of University of Oregon students and biologists, and Eastern Oregon elk hunters. To this day, many of our members and supporters are hunters and anglers. We have collaborated with organizations such as the Coastal Conservation Association to reform the use of indiscriminate gillnets on the Columbia River, and we have worked with Oregon Hunters Association and

others to ensure public lands remain in public hands. We understand and support ODFW's role in regulating and supporting hunting and fishing activities in our state. However, the agency must devote adequate resources and staff to fulfill its larger mission – to protect and enhance all species of Oregon's native fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Hunters and anglers are rightfully concerned about how license and fee dollars are allocated. Similarly, non-hunting and fishing Oregonians, who make up about 90% of our state's population, are similarly concerned about where and how their tax dollars are spent. As a general principle, Oregon Wild believes general fund allocations to ODFW should go towards programs that benefit Oregonians broadly, not to programs with other sources of funding. For example, non-game and endangered species conservation, landowner education and assistance programs, basic science, and habitat restoration and protection programs should be the priority for any general fund allocations to ODFW.

It's becoming more evident that ODFW's challenge to sufficiently fund existing conservation programs and proactively seek out new opportunities proves symptomatic of two larger issues: one, ODFW's struggle to effectively fulfill all aspects of their mission and two, adequately represent the majority of Oregonians, most of whom don't hunt or fish.

The OPB series, which I previously mentioned, highlighted the impacts of funding inadequacies on non-game conservation programs, ODFW staff, and the ability of the agency to effectively address sensitive species' needs. The report revealed that some ODFW biologists even used personal funds to pay for necessary equipment to conduct work-related research in the field. And with a decline in fishing and hunting licenses, it's becoming clear that ODFW must re-examine traditional funding mechanisms and diversify funding sources for conservation programs.

Addressing ODFW budget challenges and funding for conservation programs cannot be done in a vacuum. Historically, ODFW and the Fish and Wildlife Commission have placed a larger emphasis on consumptive programs, but it is imperative for the longevity of the agency and their ability to expand conservation programs, they represent and reflect broad public values.

Specific Policy Option Packages (POP's):

We oppose #145, which would cut funding for the Oregon Conservation Strategy. This is ODFW's primary non-game species conservation program, and its current funding levels are already wholly inadequate to meet the needs of Oregon. Further cuts to the program would be a giant step backwards.

We support full funding for #108, which ensures water quality and quantity for our fish and wildlife.

We strongly support package 090 adjustment, which eliminates \$470,140 in funding for Wildlife Services.

Oregonians aspire to have a fish and wildlife agency which seeks to proactively protect and restore native fish and wildlife species before becoming endangered, assist landowners who want to provide and protect necessary wildlife habitat throughout the state, and inspire and encourage the next generation of Oregonians to connect to nature through an array of non-consumptive activities like hiking, bird-watching, and photography.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. Thank you.