

March 28, 2017

Testimony on House Bill 5010

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

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Senator Frederick, Representative Witt and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Budget. The Nature Conservancy works closely with the Department across the state on key fish and wildlife conservation issues. The Department plays critical roles that provides a wide range of benefits to Oregonians – including benefits to our economy and our quality of life. As such, The Nature Conservancy supports many elements of their budget.

Today I am here to focus your attention on two critical ODFW funding items.

First, we appreciate the incredible challenge you face in developing a balanced budget this year, but urge you to add ODFW's Policy Option Package 110 back into the budget.

Reversing the downward trend in Greater Sage-grouse numbers should be both a conservation and economic development priority for Oregon. **Policy Option Package 110 would maintain the Sage Grouse Mitigation Coordinator position created with funding in the 2015 legislatively approved budget.** The Mitigation Program is an important part of the state's commitment to implementing our "all-lands, all-threats" sage-grouse plan. Federal agencies, private landowners and conservation organizations are all providing significant funding to help implement actions identified in Oregon's Sage Grouse Action Plan. But other partners can't address this need – **the state needs to lead in this important role.**

The Sage Grouse Mitigation Coordinator benefits both conservation and economic development needed in central and southeastern Oregon. **It positions ODFW to help counties and developers steer development away from the most sensitive habitats and more efficiently meet compensatory mitigation requirements. It is a critical element of the State's commitment to improve protections for Greater Sage Grouse that helped to result in the decision not to list the species under the Endangered Species Act. This effectively maintained state control and averted the need for additional US Fish and Wildlife Service regulations. The decision not to list sage grouse under the ESA will be up for review in 2020 – we must keep the momentum going for effective implementation and a positive review in 2020.**

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the critical importance of the Department's role in monitoring Oregon's marine reserves. **We appreciate the legislature's past support for funding marine reserve monitoring and encourage your continued support. Information gained from the long-term study of the effect of reserves on fish populations helps the state, organizations like ours, commercial and sport fishers and others design a future in which Oregon fisheries and the businesses dependent upon them thrive.** We thank you in advance for supporting the continued funding for marine reserve monitoring.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony on HB 5010.