



HB 2402
JOINT INTERIM TASK FORCE

**FUNDING FOR FISH, WILDLIFE AND RELATED
OUTDOOR RECREATION AND EDUCATION**

**REPORT TO OREGON LEGISLATURE
TRANSMITTAL AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

December 31, 2016



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Members of the Oregon Legislature,

On behalf of the HB 2402 Legislative Task Force, we submit the following report for your consideration.

The Task Force for funding for Fish, Wildlife and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education was created by HB 2402 in the 2015 Legislative Session. We were charged with developing recommendations to strengthen the State's ability to conserve natural resources and connect Oregonians to nature through outdoor recreation and education opportunities.

The Task Force was comprised of 17 members from throughout Oregon, four non-voting legislators and two ex officio members (Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission Chair Mike Finley and Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Curt Melcher). We met twelve times from January through November 2016, and convened two groups to develop draft recommendations for full Task Force consideration.

Our report to you provides a summary of several thousand hours of hard work by very dedicated and caring Oregonians. We took our Legislative charge very seriously by:

1. Identifying and recommending potential alternative, sustainable funding sources for the Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW).
2. Recommending potential program adjustments to ensure relevant ODFW program areas are funded in accordance with Legislative direction.
3. Recommending opportunities for ODFW to better achieve its mission through leveraging, coordinating and budgeting funds from alternate and existing sources.


We contacted and received reports from other states on how their fish and wildlife agencies are funded. We conducted a statistically valid survey of Oregonians to ask their opinion on how fish and wildlife should be funded and what their impressions were of the agency. We developed stringent criteria to evaluate potential funding options. In other words, we have done our homework. But, we did not stop there. We took our draft ideas on a road show and asked others for their feedback and ideas if we were on the right track. We listened carefully to what they had to say and incorporated their comments into this report.

We talked to numerous groups such as the League of Oregon Cities, Association of Oregon Counties, Oregon Cattlemen's Association, ODFW External Stakeholder Advisory Committee, Oregon Outdoor Recreation and Parks Association, leaders of the Oregon outdoor recreation community, Oregon Land Trust Alliance, Oregon Association of Conservation Districts, Oregon Conservation Network, Oregon Audubon Society chapters, African American Outdoor Association/Center for Diversity & the Environment, Northwest Sports Fishing Association, Oregon Hunters Association, Oregon Business Council/Oregon Business Alliance/Association of Oregon Industries, Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, Oregon Farm Bureau, Travel Oregon and others. During our deliberations, we also provided updates on our draft recommendations to the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Coastal Caucus.

What we heard confirms the importance of acting now to address the increasing costs of conservation and management of fish, wildlife and habitat, as well as related recreational and educational opportunities. New and sustainable sources of revenue are needed to supplement existing funding and enable ODFW to better meet its statutory mission and Legislatively-assigned responsibilities. We also heard that Oregon's future should not be limited by the traditional model of hunting and fishing fees, but by a more diversified source of revenues, which will allow a more holistic and equitable approach to fish and wildlife conservation, management, recreation and education. Our recommendation, however, are about much more than sustainable funding. Investing in the future is needed to ensure that our children and grandchildren can experience the natural world, to increase our understanding of the more than 700 species of fish and wildlife that make Oregon home, to improve fishing and hunting and reduce license fees that currently fund most conservation efforts, and to recognize our diversity by providing opportunities for all Oregonians to enjoy our rich outdoor heritage.

To respond to the challenges facing Oregon's fish and wildlife, we are recommending a new approach to conservation funding, an Oregon Conservation Fund dedicated to conservation, management, research, habitat improvements, administration, enforcement and other activities that protect, maintain or enhance the native fish and wildlife of the state. Our recommendations further include a defined funding need (or goal) and funding mechanisms that are sufficient, sustainable and responsive to increasing program costs over time. We considered close to one hundred potential funding options and, after sifting the options through our strict criteria over many meetings, we offer for your consideration two options for you to begin the discussion with your colleagues. We know you have difficult decisions to make in the upcoming Legislative session. We stand ready to assist you in your efforts to achieve the three charges you gave us in moving HB 2402 from concept to action.

Respectfully Submitted,



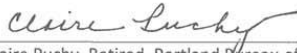
Mark Labhart, Tillamook County Board of Commissioners
Chair



Scott Welch, Columbia Sportswear



Rob Morrison, Leupold & Stevens Corp.



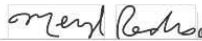
Claire Puchy, Retired, Portland Bureau of Environmental Services



Robb Ball, The Nature Conservancy



Kenji Sugahara, OR Bicycle Racing Association



Meryl Redisch, Retired, Portland Audubon Society



Bruce Taylor, OR Habitat Joint Venture



James Nash, 6 Ranch Fly Fishing



Representative Ken Helm, OR Legislature
Ex-officio



Curt Melcher, ODFW Director
Ex-officio



Tricia Tillman, Multnomah County Health Department



Queta Gonzalez, Center for Diversity & Environment



Kari Westlund, Travel Lane County



Nancy Bales, Gray Family Foundation



Jim Martin, Retired, Pure Fishing Company
Member



Brad Pettinger, Oregon Trawl Commission
Member



Mike Herbel, Neskowin Store



Paul Donheffner, OR Hunters Association



Mike Finley, ODFW Commission Chair
Ex-officio



Jim Owens, Facilitator
Cogan Owens Greene, LLC

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED 11.28.16

Task 1: Identify and recommend potential alternative, sustainable funding sources for ODFW.

The following funding recommendations are not about stabilizing or increasing the agency's budget, but rather enabling the agency to accomplish its mission to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations.

1. Establish the Oregon Conservation Fund dedicated to conservation, management, research, habitat improvements, administration, enforcement and other activities that protect, maintain or enhance the native fish and wildlife of the state.
 - Based on its evaluation criteria and extensive consideration, an Oregon Income Tax Return Surcharge or a Wholesale Beverage Surcharge (details below) are identified as the most viable alternatives to adequately finance the Fund. In assessing these or other funding mechanisms, the Legislature is encouraged to review the evaluation criteria developed by the Task Force, especially that the funding be sufficient, sustainable and responsive to increasing program costs over time.
 - Through the Fund, dedicate to ODFW a minimum of \$85.9 million/biennium in new revenues, with no reduction in current revenues or reallocation to other programs. Dedicate the new revenues to:
 - Expanded conservation efforts = \$46.7 million/biennium
 - Improved hunting and fishing opportunities/elimination of scheduled license fee increases = \$21.3 million/biennium
 - Connecting Oregonians with the Outdoors = \$8.3 million/biennium
 - Deferred Maintenance = \$9.6 million/biennium
 - This proposed new funding assumes that General Fund and Lottery Fund allocations to ODFW are maintained at current levels.
2. In addition to allocating additional funding to improving hunting and fishing opportunities, acknowledge the contribution of license fees to ODFW funding through program adjustments (see Task 2 below).
3. Develop monitoring and reporting programs based on specific metrics and routinely assess and report on funding outcomes.
4. In implementation of HB 3315, support the Department's efforts to collect and analyze data on the costs of services provided to other state agencies, while acknowledging that insufficient information is available at this time to affect HB 2402 funding recommendations.
5. Support national legislation for conservation program funding developed by the National Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Blue Ribbon Panel.

Task 2: Develop recommendations on whether funding adjustments are necessary to ODFW program areas.

HB 2402 intent includes: “Prioritize actions and allocation of resources that provide for the long-term sustainability of the department and its ability to meet its mission.” While the Legislation can be interpreted to suggest a detailed review of specific ODFW programs and its associated budget allocations, the Task Force believes that such a micro-review is beyond the scope of its assignment and more properly the purview of the Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Legislature. Given the abbreviated timeframe established in HB 2402 for delivery of its recommendations to the Legislature, the Task Force has chosen to concentrate its energies on identification of alternative, sustainable funding, which it believes HB 2402 clearly establishes as its primary and priority assignment. At the same time, comprehensive program adjustments are inherent in the identified funding need and recommended allocations of alternative funding, the most significant being to allocate more than half of new alternative funding to expanded conservation efforts. In addition, the Task Force is recommending the following program adjustments to address the Legislative intent in HB 2402.

Programmatic Adjustments Generally

1. In conjunction with establishment of the Oregon Conservation Fund, establish an oversight process for ongoing review of the Department’s allocation of resources and for monitoring of Fund spending in accordance with the Department’s mission and these Task Force recommendations.

Expand Conservation Efforts (55% of funding target)

2. Expand and improve the agency’s conservation efforts, with implementation of conservation programs and strategies identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy and Nearshore Strategy as a priority use of alternative funding.
3. Increase funding for science, research, monitoring and inventories of species and habitat to fill data gaps.
4. Increase investments in data management, analysis and distribution.
5. Increase efforts to restore ecosystems to resiliency.
6. Expand enforcement of laws to protect and conserve natural resources.
7. Expand conservation partnerships and dedicate a portion of new alternative funds for grants for on-the-ground conservation projects.

Improve Fishing and Hunting (25% of funding target)

8. Eliminate authorized second and third phases of license fee increases.
 9. Index future license fee increases to the cost of inflation or other similar measure.
 10. In consultation with hunting and fishing interests, target the use of new funding to improved hunting and fishing opportunities and to marketing those opportunities.
 11. Develop specific programs to provide additional fishing opportunities for urban and underserved communities, including but not limited to expanded fish stocking and new stocking locations.
 12. Secure additional and improve existing public fishing and hunting access and supporting infrastructure.
 13. Expand and improve research, monitoring and management of both game and non-game species.
 14. Expand collaborative efforts to improve and restore fish and wildlife habitat.
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15. Expand enforcement of fish and wildlife regulations, focusing on areas currently with limited enforcement presence.

Connect Oregonians with the Outdoors (10% of funding target)

16. Expand and improve current communications and public outreach programs, focusing on underrepresented communities and urban areas.
17. Develop additional wildlife viewing opportunities and facilities.
18. Assess what communications and outreach efforts are better conducted by private and non-profit entities rather than by the Department.
19. Expand and develop new conservation education programs.
20. Develop a more comprehensive social media strategy that includes communication with a broader audience through the latest technologies.
21. Expand localized outreach efforts, such as staff presence at public events, providing content in multiple languages, and partnering with key influencers to encourage participation.
22. Build an internal culture and capacity to improve connections to diverse and underserved communities through a strong human resources program.

Deferred Maintenance (10% of funding target)

23. Adopt a multi-biennial bonding approach to addressing deferred infrastructure needs.
24. In the first biennium following Fund implementation, conduct a thorough assessment to determine more accurate deferred maintenance funding needs.

Task 3: Identify and recommend opportunities for leveraging, coordinating and budgeting funds from alternative and existing sources.

1. Pursue landscape-level, cooperative efforts modeled after the Mule Deer Initiative that accomplish multiple conservation objectives.
 2. Expand volunteer education partnerships such as the Hunter Education program.
 3. Investigate establishing a recreation and education partnership among agencies that reduces redundancies and improves connections to the public.
 4. Pursue partnerships with the academic community to coordinate conservation research.
 5. Continue to partner on projects to improve or restore habitat with public and private entities that own or manage land.
 6. Pursue opportunities to coordinate with the outdoor recreation community.
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