



OREGON HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

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Testimony on HB-2747
Oregon Hunters Association
Paul Donheffner, Legislative Chairman

The Oregon Hunters Association, with over 10,000 members in 26 chapters statewide, is very interested in HB 2747, which would change the makeup of the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission. We share the love-hate relationship that many other groups and individuals feel in their dealings with the Commission.

We are often frustrated when politics and emotion creep into decisions that should be based on the best available science. The long delays and postponements over a decision on an updated Wolf Plan are a top of mind example. Would this change if the makeup of the Commission were different? It's hard to know.

In an ideal world, members of the commission should be impartial and open to listening to various points of view, weighing the best science based input from staff and stakeholders, sorting out the emotion vs. facts, and making decisions that are in the best interest of our natural resources and all Oregonians. Wouldn't that be nice.

Alas, we don't live in that ideal world. Finding citizen volunteers to serve and fill these positions and be fair judges of balls and strikes isn't easy. Would things be better under the proposed makeup of the Commission under HB 2747? We honestly don't know, but worry that this would make it more divisive and harder to reach consensus decisions. Commissioners who look at everything through an "interest" group lens might diminish the role of professional staff and science based decision making.

I have attached a brief description of the makeup of Fish and Wildlife Commissions in 9 western states. Nevada uses criteria similar to HB 2747. Most don't have so many prescribed interest groups, although a few do specify agricultural or ranching interests. Most are general appointments by geographic area, and some have party affiliation as a criteria.

One thing we do know - there is nothing particularly special about appointing based on congressional districts. These artificial boundaries distort the state and do nothing to get the best qualified persons on the Commission. It broadens the urban-rural divide that many of our members see in wildlife management decisions. Without making the commission based on interest groups, it might be worth exploring the geographic angle further. Washington for example, uses 3 east and 3 west of the Cascades and 3 "at large" with no two from the same county. This is preferable to using congressional districts, which loads NW Oregon and the Portland area.

The question for us is are we better off with something we know, even if we don't always like it, vs. something we don't. We are wary. We don't have that answer yet, but this bill certainly has our full attention and we want to be a part of the conversation that has tremendous implications for the future of hunting, fishing and wildlife management.

Composition of Fish and Wildlife Commissions in Western States

Washington

The Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission is comprised of nine citizen members, each appointed by the Governor. Commission appointees are subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Under current state law, the Commission must include three members from west of the Cascade Mountains, three members from east of the Cascade Mountains and three “at-large” members who may reside anywhere in the state. No two Commission members may reside in the same county ([RCW 77.04.030](#)).

Montana

The five-member Commission is appointed by the Governor from five geographical districts. Members serve staggered four-year terms, with three members appointed at the beginning of the Governor's term and two appointed two years after the Governor's term begins. The appointments are to be made without regard to political affiliation and to be made solely for the wise management of the fish and wildlife of the state. At least one member must be experienced in the breeding and management of domestic livestock.

Idaho

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission was created by public initiative in 1938. Commissioners are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Idaho State Senate.

Commissioners are appointed by the Governor in staggered four-year terms. No more than four commissioners may be from the same political party. Each commissioner is confirmed by the Idaho State Senate. In 1996, the Senate approved adding a seventh district to the existing six to meet the needs of Idaho's regions.

The seven commissioners, each representing a different region of the state, are responsible for administering the fish and game policy of the state as described in state code section 36-103.

To be appointed, commissioners must be a bona fide resident of the region from which they are appointed, and be well informed and interested in wildlife conservation and restoration. During their terms, commissioners may not hold any other elective or appointive office.

Nevada

9-Governor appointed members represent: one-farming, one-ranching, one conservation, one-general public and five-sportsmen.

Wyoming

Seven members are appointed by the Governor for six-year terms with Senate confirmation. Not more than five members shall be of the same party (W.S. 23-1-201).

California

In 1937 the Fish and Game Commission was increased from three to its current five members, and in 1940 a constitutional amendment provided for six-year staggered terms with Commissioners appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation by the Senate according to Government Code subsection 1774(c).

Utah

Utah's Division of Wildlife Resources is part of a larger Dept of Natural Resources, it has no direct commission.

Arizona

The Commission is composed of five members appointed by the Governor pursuant to ARS 38-211. The Commission appoints the Director of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the Director serves as secretary to the Commission. No more than one commissioner may be from any one county. No more than three may be from the same political party. Each commissioner serves a five-year term, staggered. Commissioners customarily serve as chairman during their last year.

New Mexico

Seven Commission members are appointed to up to four-year terms by the governor and confirmed by the State Senate. Not more than four members can be from the same political party. Five of the members represent different geographical areas of the state. The other two members are appointed "at large." At least one member of the commission shall represent agricultural interests and one member represent conservation interests.

(Source: OHA search of websites for various Fish and Wildlife Commissions by Paul Donheffner, OHA Legislative Committee Chairman)