



OREGON FOREST &  
INDUSTRIES COUNCIL  
SUSTAINABILITY. SCIENCE. INNOVATION. GROWTH.



## House Committee on Natural Resources

### Re: HB 2747

Chair Witt, members of the committee,

As a coalition of natural resource organizations, we urge the committee to evaluate and support structural changes to the selection and appointment of members to the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission.

Over the past several years our organizations have worked closely with the Governor's office to secure adequate representation of Oregonians from all regions of the state who manage or own our private rangeland, forest, and farmland.

Managing land in Oregon, whether forestland, rangeland or farmland, creates a variety of unique and complex challenges when it comes to Oregon's fish & wildlife populations. Recently, the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission has lacked adequate representation, both from substantive experts with first-hand experience, and from the diverse geographical and ecological regions of Oregon, who can speak directly to a wide range of complex issues facing our membership. This is at a time where we see increasing conversations about the protected status of a growing number of species throughout the state, more demands on existing water resources, the politicization of scientific research and data, and an economic and demographic shift in Oregon with smaller segments of the population engaged in our natural resource and agricultural economy.

Our members provide (at their own cost) habitat, feed, and forage that supports the sustainable biodiversity that Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) is tasked with managing. Our members voluntarily and proactively seek to ensure the maintenance and growth of many fish and wildlife populations on their land. Just a few examples include ranchers allowing elk to access bailed hay during hard winters, farmers investing privately in stream restoration projects to boost trout and salmon populations adjacent to their property, or our collective members partnering with researchers and universities to understand various species from sage grouse to marbled murrelets. However, as the committee is well aware, there are times when the risks and costs of specific regulatory requirements shift to landowners, their communities and our respective industries.

In these instances, some of the most difficult, politically-charged, and sensitive discussions require representation and feedback from a diverse set of stakeholders, and omitting those stakeholders from the Commission's voting process can have unintended and unfair results. At a minimum, policy decisions that could have significant personal and economic impacts on any community should include the affected parties. Most importantly, decisions should be made

ensuring all impacted voices are at least heard. That hasn't necessarily been the case in the past several years.

These challenges are magnified by ODFW's financial dependence on licensing fees that come directly from the fish & wildlife populations supported by the land and resources our members invest in, manage and own. We pay to support the very wildlife that drives revenue for ODFW, yet we currently lack a voice on the Commission.

Unfortunately, time and again, regardless of long conversations and seemingly good-faith indications from the Governor's staff, it's been nearly four years since the Oregon Fish & Wildlife Commission has included a member from one of our industries. In this time no commission member has had significant involvement or insight into private land management and the challenges related to regulatory compliance, cost, or risk related to fish and wildlife issues. For these reasons, it is absolutely critical that our forest, farm and range management have a direct voice on the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission, as should other stakeholder groups listed in HB 2747.

The current system is not yielding adequate representation to tackle a growing number of complex issues, and we hope the legislature will address this shortcoming of our existing process. This is not solely to ensure adequate representation by those who are impacted most by Commission decisions and rules, but to ensure broad representation where members of the Commission can educate one another and direct ODFW staff. This will result in better policy, and more importantly, better engagement between the public and the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department. We all work better collectively when every impacted parties feel heard and included.

We urge your support of HB 2747.