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March 10, 2019

House Committee on Natural Resources:

Chair, Representative Brad Witt
Vice-Chair, Representative Chris Gorsek
Vice-Chair, Representative Sherrie Sprenger
Member, Representative Greg Barreto
Member, Representative Caddy McKeown
Member, Representative Jeff Reardon
Member, Representative David Brock Smith

RE: HB 2829 re Oregon Conservation & Recreation Fund (OCRF)

Dear Chair Witt, Vice-Chairs Gorsek and Sprenger, and Members of the Committee:

Since I cannot be in attendance for your upcoming public hearing on March 14th, I am submitting written testimony. I respectfully request that it be entered into the public record.

I am enthusiastically in support of House Bill 2829, which establishes the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, and which appropriates General Fund money to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). My concern and knowledge about this subject is deep and spans several decades.

During the 1990's, I was the Wildlife Diversity Program Coordinator for ODFW. Oregon was a national leader in wildlife conservation, and developed the first Nongame Wildlife Management Plan in the U.S. This Plan was recognized as a model for other states, and subsequent updates resulted in what is now called the Oregon Conservation Strategy and Nearshore Strategy. Funding sources such as General Funds, federal grants, the Nongame Wildlife Tax Checkoff that once existed were never adequate, and those have all but disappeared. As a result, Oregon is not adequately protecting, maintaining or enhancing its 850 native fish and wildlife species through research, management, habitat improvement, enforcement and conservation. Those activities are now reliant on fish and hunting license fees and federal excise taxes. This is not sustainable, nor is it appropriate. Native fish and wildlife belong to *all* Oregonians, and the cost of carrying out the State mandate (ORS 496.012)—that wildlife be managed to prevent serious depletion of any indigenous species and to provide the optimum recreational and aesthetic benefits for present and future generations—must be shared more equitably. A broader funding base is critical. Appropriating General Fund money is entirely suitable.

Governor Brown appointed me to the Task Force on Funding for Fish, Wildlife and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education in 2015. The Task Force was charged with identifying and recommending potential new and sustainable funding sources for ODFW, including strengthening efforts benefitting non-hunters and non-anglers. We issued our recommendations to the Legislative Assembly in December 2016. Our recommendations were not enacted, and unfortunately the need still exists. House Bill 2829 provides a good start towards meeting the State mandate.

One important aspect of providing funding for ODFW, is that it would allow the funds to be used as state match to leverage federal funding, including the "Recovering America's Wildlife Act". This, of course, means that state funding will go much further. It would be unfortunate if Oregon would leave "money on the table" for lack of a state match.

While serving on the Task Force, a public survey was conducted to assess Oregonian's knowledge of, and support for, funding fish and wildlife and related activities. Of eight fish and wildlife values, citizens ranked the existence of healthy fish and wildlife populations and that water resources are safe and well-protected as the most important. Also, supporting taxes as a funding source was the top response to an open-ended question. Forty percent of respondents thought that general state taxes should be the main source of funding for ODFW. And after learning that only nine percent of ODFW's funding comes from General Fund revenues, 41 percent thought this was too little. This underscores the importance of the funding mechanism called for in HB 2829.

Although I do not believe an Oregon Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee, as called for in HB 2829, is absolutely necessary, I am not opposed to such a committee.

Finally, it's important to point out that taking steps to protect species and their habitats while they are healthy is much less expensive than efforts to recover species once they are threatened or endangered. HB 2829 provides a long-overdue way of "getting ahead of the curve" while it is still possible.

Thank you for considering my comments on HB 2829. I strongly urge you to approve it.

Sincerely,

Claire A. Puchy

cc: Kailey Kornhauser, Analyst for the House Committee on Natural Resources
Greg Mintz, Legislative Director, Office of Representative Ken Helm