

HB 2829 Testimony

Mark Labhart, Chair

Legislative Task Force on

Funding for Fish, Wildlife, and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education.

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What HB 2829 proposes to do. HB 2829 establishes the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and appropriates funds to ODF&W to carry out activities to protect, maintain or enhance fish and wildlife resources in Oregon. It appropriates \$17 million in GF dollars for the biennium beginning July 1, 1019. It also provides a vehicle for gifts, grants, contributions or other donations from any public or private source received for the purposes of the Fund. It also establishes an Oregon Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee to review department policies regarding use of fund moneys and make recommendations regarding use of fund moneys for implementing and administering department activities. And finally, it requires a biennial report to the Legislature.

What's behind this concept (HB 2402/Legislative Task Force) The Legislature in 2015 directed the formation of a 17-member Task Force on Funding for Fish, Wildlife, and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education. It was formed to address unfunded and increasing costs to ODFW of conservation and related outdoor recreation and education. The Legislature also identified the need to improve public understanding and participation in recreational and educational opportunities related to the diverse species and habitats in Oregon. We were a diverse group of individuals representing a broad array of outdoor interests such as Columbia Sportswear, Leupold & Stevens, Or. Hunters Association, Travel Oregon Commission, the Nature Conservancy, ranching, Portland Audubon Society and others. We also had 6 ex-officio members, including Rep. Helm and former Senators Edwards and Whitsett and former Rep. Kreiger. We met almost monthly for a year. Task Force members donated in excess of 2,000 hours of volunteer time to the State. Our recommendations were approved unanimously by the Task Force and we presented them to the Legislature on schedule in December 2016.

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What were we asked to address?

The Task Force was charged with identifying alternative, sustainable funding sources for ODFW that represent a more holistic and equitable approach to funding fish and wildlife conservation -- ensuring that all beneficiaries of the Department's services are contributing and reducing the reliance upon fishing and hunting permitting fees to fund ODFW's conservation programs.

The Task Force facilitated a statistically valid public survey that confirmed that Oregonians place a high value on both healthy fish and wildlife populations and opportunities for outdoor recreation. But our society is becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural world, affecting public health, our well-being, and the future of fish and wildlife in Oregon. Outdoor recreational opportunities are an important pathway for Oregonians to reconnect with the natural world that supports diverse fish and wildlife. As Oregon's demographics change, efforts are needed to engage diverse and underserved communities in conservation, recreation, and education programs.

How did we come up with this proposal through our Task Force process)? The Task Force reviewed a myriad of options to fund this effort, analyzing more than 100 funding alternatives. We used the Oregon way to develop funding options. We listened. We collaborated. We debated. We developed criteria to evaluate proposals. We did what the Legislature asked us to do which was take this challenge head on to find a new way of funding conservation and management of Oregon's fish and wildlife. To everyone's surprise, we unanimously endorsed a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Legislature. HB 2829 is a first step in implementing those recommendations.