

March 14, 2019

**TESTIMONY ON HB 2829  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

**SUBMITTED BY:        MARK LABHART, CHAIR  
                              JIM OWENS, FACILITATOR  
                              HB 2402 JOINT INTERIM TASK FORCE  
                              FUNDING FOR FISH, WILDLIFE AND RELATED OUTDOOR RECREATION &  
                              EDUCATION**

- What HB 2829 proposes to do.
  - HB 2829 establishes the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and appropriates general fund moneys to ODF&W to carry out activities serving to protect, maintain or enhance fish and wildlife resources in Oregon.
  - Appropriates \$17 million in GF dollars for biennium beginning July 1, 1019; expenditures limited to activities described in the legislation.
  - Provides 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.
  - Requires 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 of Oregon.
  - We were a diverse group of individuals representing a broad array of outdoor interests such as Columbia Sportwear, Leupold & Stevens, Or. Hunters Association, Oregon Travel 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.

- Presented our recommendations -- approved unanimously -- to the Legislature on schedule in December 2016.
- What are we solving for.  
The Task Force undertook a 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.

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.

- How did we come up with this proposal.  
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.

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- What would the Fund do.  
In line with the Task Force's recommendations and under the guidance of the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Advisory Committee to be established in conjunction with the Fund
    - Fund wildlife conservation, management, research, habitat improvements, and enforcement, with a focus on implementing the Oregon Conservation Strategy.
    - Expand opportunities for outdoor recreation related to fish and wildlife, including hunting and fishing opportunities.
    - Reduce reliance upon hunting and fishing fees to fund ODFW's conservation responsibilities.

- Increase education and outreach to diverse and underserved communities -- helping to get more Oregonians outdoors and participating in outdoor recreation.
  - Conservation and recreation have intentionally been interconnected throughout the Task Force's deliberations and in its recommendations and thus the Fund title. HB 2829 specifically enables the potential for joint projects of ODFW and Oregon Parks & recreation Department, or other state agencies.
- Why is it needed now.
    - As ODFW staff will testify to shortly, we may very soon see an opportunity to receive new federal funds for fish and wildlife conservation through the Recovering America's Wildlife Act. That funding will require a state wildlife plan, which we have in the Oregon Conservation Strategy. It will also require a state match, which we do not have.
    - Just as importantly, we need a vehicle to solicit and receive public and private funds for conservation. During the Task Force process, we had numerous conversations with the outdoor recreation industry and private foundations about private sector contributions to improving conservation efforts, outdoor education programs, and programs to get underserved communities (particularly youth) outdoors. There was clear willingness to contribute, but only if the state stepped up first and demonstrated its own financial commitment. Your seed-funding of the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund would provide this vehicle.
    - Finally, I want to reiterate the comments made several times that the legislation in front of you is the product of several thousand hours of task force deliberations, a task force created by the Legislature, a task force that successfully completed its mission. The concept of an Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund was a unanimous recommendation of that group. I think we owe it to them to move this bill forward.