

March 13, 2019

Testimony in support of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2019-21 budget

Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Submitted by: Kathleen Brennan-Hunter, Director of Conservation Programs, The Nature Conservancy

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, I am testifying in support of the **Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) 2019-21 budget.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based and non-partisan conservation organization. Our mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. The organization has over 70,000 supporters statewide with members in every county in Oregon. Our staff, based in communities across the state, work collaboratively with tribes, government agencies, elected officials, landowners, businesses, and stakeholders to develop solutions to the challenges facing people and nature.

TNC supports the State's investment in protecting and enhancing Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats as outlined in the Governor's proposed 2019-2021 Budget and we commend your hard work in crafting a balanced budget. There are many important programs within ODFW that benefit recreation, commercial industries, the public and wildlife. As you make decisions, we hope you will retain the agency's many programs at full funding levels, including the Marine Reserves and Protected Areas program (\$2,139,925) and investments in the conservation of the Greater Sage-grouse (\$500,000).

In addition to funding base operations of the agency, TNC respectfully requests your support for the following policy option packages.

Policy Package 114: Oregon Conservation Strategy Implementation (\$999,304 General Fund) – Provides three positions and funding for research, monitoring, and on-the-ground conservation actions of at-risk species identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy. The positions will be housed across the state (Burns, La Grande, and Newport), with the primary responsibility of coordinating on-the-ground conservation efforts.

Policy Package 123: Restore and Enhance Water Quality and Quantity (\$314,717 General Fund and \$65,303 Other Funds) – Allows the ODFW Water Program to inventory, evaluate and prioritize instream needs in a changing climate and use this information while collaborating with water users to find creative water solutions that address multiple needs.

Policy Package 102 and 103 Matching Funds for US Farm Bill funded fish and wildlife biologists (POP102: \$142,500 Lottery Funds and \$570,000 Federal Funds; POP103: \$60,516 Lottery Funds and \$242,064 Federal Funds) – The U.S. Farm Bill invests in programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program and Agricultural Lands Easement Program, driving millions of dollars in conservation practices each year throughout Oregon. By partnering with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, ODFW can leverage federal dollars by committing three dedicated staff (for wildlife) and one dedicated staff (for fish) and associated resources to work with private landowners.

The following policy option was not included in the Governor’s requested budget and we urge your support for these packages.

Policy Package 118: Nearshore Fisheries Independent Survey (\$1,898,350) – Establishes a new fishery-independent research team to perform at-sea surveys for nearshore groundfish data and stock assessments for recreationally and commercially important species. Currently the State of Oregon does not have the data or data collection capabilities to assess important nearshore fishery stocks that are critically important to commercial fisheries making the sustainable management of fisheries very challenging.

Policy Package 126: Klamath Anadromous Fish Reintroduction Monitoring, Research and Evaluation (\$1,275,091 General Fund, \$107,671 Federal Funds) – Provides personnel and funds to research, monitor, and evaluate needs for anadromous fish in the Klamath River Basin.

In addition to the Governor and Agency Budget Requested policy options, there are bills moving through this legislative session that, if enacted, require funding to launch and implement important programs. We request that you speak to the bill sponsors about the prospects of these bills and ensure the needed funds are included in the ODFW budget.

Investment in Greater Sage-grouse local implementation teams (\$200,000 in addition to POP 128 for \$194,000) – Investment in ODFW’s Local Implementation Teams (LITs) is the primary vehicle for implementing the Oregon Sage Grouse Action Plan at the local level. Most of these groups have been moribund since 2012, primarily due to a lack of ODFW field-based capacity for coordination and facilitation. SageCon partners have secured funding to support coordinators for the Baker, Prineville and Vale LITs in 2019; an additional position is needed for the Burns and Lakeview groups. This request will help fill the critical local need.

HB 2437: Maintenance Activities in Dry, Traditionally Maintained Channels (\$200,000) – Allows the agency to provide technical review to ensure juvenile fish and other species are not negatively impacted from a new program allowing agricultural landowners to dredge traditionally maintained ditches, channelized, intermittent and perennial streams.

Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund – Contingent upon the flow of federal funds to ODFW, we support the creation of a new Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund to address conservation and recreation-related priorities within ODFW consistent with the

Oregon Conservation Strategy and to advance the goals of the Office of Outdoor Recreation.

Providing funding for the programs and packages listed in this letter will help Oregon to invest in the conservation, recreation and restoration of Oregon's fish, wildlife and habitats. Thank you for your consideration in the 2019-2021 budget.

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