

To

House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

900 Court Street, Salem OR



***Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2913 and HB 2600 to support the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund by restoring its funding and making it permanent***

Chair Witt and Members of the House Natural Resources Committee

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders), I am submitting the following comments **in support of HB 2913 and HB 2600**, both of which aim to make the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) financially stable, and permanent. Defenders, with nearly 2.2 million supporters nationwide, is a national wildlife conservation organization that aims to protect imperiled and native species and their habitats. On behalf of our nearly 33,000 members in Oregon, I urge the Committee to support this bill so the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has the necessary resources and a direction in protecting our state's ecologically and culturally important but fragile natural communities.

The Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) was established in 2019 through the legislature with strong bipartisan support. In doing so, our state signaled that it cares about non-consumptive use of our wildlife and natural spaces for the ecosystem services and benefits it provides to Oregonians. ODFW is one of the few state agencies in Oregon where our state's general fund dollars do not contribute to the agency's budget in any significant manner. Instead, the agency is left to support itself from sales and taxes from hunting license, tags and ammunition. This, quite predictably, has left the agency to focus their resources and capacity to manage game species and deviate from their core mission, which is protect and conserve all native species. As a result, the Oregon Conservation Strategy developed by ODFW to address fish and wildlife conservation needs in the state, has remained without any devoted funding. In a 2016 article, OPB reported that in Oregon, species that are not hunted or fished make up 88 percent of all wildlife in the state, but receive only \$9 million as opposed to game animals (\$256 million) of the state's fish and wildlife budget.

OCRF emerged as the opportunity to direct resources to the Oregon Conservation Strategy and engage members of the public in the process of promoting conservation and recreation in the state. It is also an opportunity to redirect ODFW's funding and se-

cure sources that are not driven entirely by consumptive use of wildlife. Since its formal existence in 2019, OCRF has funded several grassroots level projects that are community led, and further the conservation of habitats or species identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy. Through OCRF, our state recognized that the complexities as well as the challenges of promoting conservation and recreation cannot be addressed by a state level solution, given the diversity of our landscapes and of Oregonians. Instead, by funding local and grassroots groups and organizations, OCRF empowers them to develop innovative ideas and find local solutions to address conservation and recreation needs in their communities.

When OCRF was formed, it was under the condition that their Advisory Committee will fundraise and the state will match the raise to a \$1million in general fund moneys. However, that general fund dollars were taken away in 2020, leaving OCRF stranded with whatever amount they manage to fundraise. OCRF Advisory Committee has done an excellent job in fundraising — during a pandemic-related economically challenging time — and in using the raised dollars to support several rounds of projects in the state. But promoting stewardship of our natural resources should not be the responsibility of our citizens and private entities alone. It is equally the state's responsibility. It is also a commitment that the state made during 2019 to OCRF and to Oregonians who truly value the vision of the Fund. Reinstating the \$1million match in General Fund dollars will significantly improve OCRF ability to meet its conservation and recreation goals. At the same time, OCRF has proven in the past two years that its model works perfectly, so the sunset clause on OCRF should be removed and OCRF should be made permanent.

This legislative session the legislature has been presented with multiple options to support OCRF's funding and we urge you to use your leadership role and ensure that the end goal that is so near and dear to all Oregonians — keeping Oregon's wildlife and wild spaces healthy by supporting OCRF financially and in its longevity — is upheld.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns (Sristi Kamal: [skamal@defenders.org](mailto:skamal@defenders.org))

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sristi Kamal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sristi Kamal, Ph.D.

Senior NW Representative

Defenders of Wildlife

Portland, Oregon