



May 3, 2021

To: Natural Resources Subcommittee, Joint Ways and Means Committee

RE: Support for HB 5009 – Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Budget

Co-Chairs Representative Reardon and Senator Taylor:

The Oregon Association of Conservation Districts (OACD) supports HB 5009 relating to the 2021-23 biennial budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) are special districts governed by a locally elected board that work to protect and enhance soil quality, water quality and quantity, and fish and wildlife habitat through voluntary conservation action in collaboration with private landowners, managers, as well as federal, state, and nonprofit partners.

One example of this work is how SWCDs work on the ground with farmers, ranchers, family forest landowners and others to implement actions that maintain, enhance and/or restore important habitat needed by Oregon's diverse populations of fish and wildlife. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is a valued partner in these efforts by not only leading Oregon in the development of the *Oregon Conservation Strategy* (aka State Wildlife Action Plan) that sets priorities and focal areas for fish and wildlife conservation, but also in housing much needed professional natural resource expertise in managing fish and wildlife populations and their habitat. SWCDs especially value ODFW's cadre of fish and wildlife biologists that are located in regional field offices (aka watershed districts) throughout Oregon.

Specifically, OACD supports the creation of a **Habitat Division** within ODFW as addressed in the Governor's 2021-2023 Budget appropriating \$3.3 million General Fund and \$1.25 million in Lottery Funds, as well as the expenditure limitation for \$6.1 million in Other Funds and \$10.4 million in Federal Funds. We see this as an important first step to ensuring that ODFW is organized efficiently and has the capacity to effectively advocate for Oregon's fish and wildlife in the face of Oregon's expanding human population and the threats to, and loss of, important fish and wildlife habitat from impaired oceans, drought, wildfire, invasive species and development.

OACD also urges the Subcommittee to recommend that creation of the Habitat Division go beyond what would be created in HB 5009. As currently proposed, the Habitat Division would only house seven existing regional habitat biologists--positions that currently reside in other fish and wildlife divisions. What is needed however is expanded field biologist capacity in the Habitat Division. As such, OACD urges an amendment to HB 5009 that includes the appropriation of additional General Fund monies for the nine additional regional habitat biologist positions called for in the Habitat Division's original design. Should these additional funds not be available, then OACD urges the Subcommittee to at least include a budget note that prioritizes the funding of these nine new positions when additional monies become available.

In summary, OACD sees the creation of an ODFW Habitat Division, including expanded capacity in regional habitat biologist positions within the Division, as essential to ODFW meeting its mission to protect and enhance Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats for use and enjoyment by present and future generations. A fully designed Habitat Division also gives ODFW the capacity to lead Oregon in the implementation of the *Oregon Conservation Strategy* through partnerships and coordination with other entities such as coordinating and leveraging the funding and capacity that can be provided by SWCDs.

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