

Joint Ways and Means Committee
Subcommittee on Natural Resources
900 State Street NE
Salem, OR 97301

May 3rd, 2021

Dear Chair Taylor, Chair Reardon, and Committee Members:

On behalf of Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) and our supporters in Oregon, the Pacific Northwest, and beyond, I am submitting these comments on specific items for Natural Resource agencies in the 2021-2023 Oregon budget. We urge you to ensure appropriate funding to support state agencies working on healthy water, fish and wildlife protection, and safeguarding our unique Pacific Northwest ecosystem.

WDC works to recover the distinct group of orcas known as the Southern Resident community, a specific population of orcas (killer whales) that differs from all other orcas in the Pacific Northwest and in the world, with unique genes, behavior, dialect, and culture. They are truly "Pacific Northwest orcas," living for millennia in the Salish Sea and the coastal waters of Washington, Oregon, and Northern California, and subsisting mainly on another iconic species of the Northwest: Chinook salmon. As salmon throughout their range have declined, the Southern Residents have suffered. Without enough food, they have impaired body condition, reduced growth rates, changes in their social structure, reduced fecundity, and reduced overall survival. They have been listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act since 2005, and have just 75 individuals remaining in the wild. Oregon must do its part to advance the recovery of these iconic orcas by restoring and protecting healthy watersheds to support salmon, their primary food source.

We are asking that the Committee include funding in Oregon's 2021-2023 biennial budget to support programs within the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) that are vital for salmon and watersheds in Oregon. Adequate funding for these agencies and programs is essential to managing Oregon's water resources to support fish and wildlife.

Oregon Water Resources Department: Oregon must invest in OWRD programs driven by data, science, and smart water management. Under challenges posed by climate change and a history of inequitable water decisions in Oregon, smart, responsible, and equitable water management is one of our state's most critical environmental and economic challenges. To support better water management in Oregon, we ask that you fund OWRD capacity for water management (POP 109) to support the field staff that are critical for on-the-ground water management across the state.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife: ODFW is responsible for the management and recovery of salmon populations in Oregon. Habitat restoration and protection, along with monitoring and management of water quality, in-stream flows, and temperatures are necessary to support or rebuild healthy salmon populations, and ODFW needs appropriate funding to meet current goals and achieve new ones in the next two years. To support salmon management and recovery, we ask that you support:

- Allowing ODFW to spend funds on culvert repair (POP 105). Under an agreement with the Oregon Department of Transportation, ODFW has generated funds to inventory and prioritize road crossings to improve fish passage. Culverts present significant barriers to salmon migration, and many are in urgent need of repair or replacement to improve salmon passage.
- Establishing the ODFW Habitat Division to better coordinate the Department's work to maintain and restore habitat (POP 112). A significant challenge to the recovery and survival of salmon is the quality and quantity of available habitat. A consistent statewide effort to protect existing habitat and restore watersheds where needed is critical to salmon recovery. A dedicated Habitat Division would focus the Department's efforts and support the development and implementation of science-based policies and recommendations.

Willamette Water Reallocation: Congress recently passed legislation that included the reallocation of stored water in 13 federal reservoirs in the Willamette Basin, allowing municipal/industrial and fish & wildlife uses in addition to irrigation use. Implementing this reallocation and managing water for salmon at the state level will require significant coordination capacity for activities in the Basin. Both ODFW and OWRD require funding to support this process and ensure science-based and equitable management in the Willamette Basin (ODFW POP 115,



OWRD POP 113).

While we appreciate that many of the items in the agency requested budgets were included in the Governor's recommended budget, some critical items were not advanced. We ask that you please take action to ensure the following items receive funding in 2021-2023:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

- Support funding for the reintroduction and monitoring of salmon in the Klamath Basin (POP 103). Oregon is a signatory on the Klamath Basin Restoration Agreement (KBRA) and, with the state of California and the Klamath River Recovery Corporation, will lead on removing the four lower Klamath River dams in 2022. In accordance with the KBRA, Oregon is committed to helping restore salmon to the upper Klamath River, and this position is essential to monitor, evaluate, and lead this process.
- Support funding to protect fish and wildlife in regional water discussions (POP 114). Planning under the Integrated Water Resources Strategy requires basin-specific, place-based efforts to meet instream and out-of-stream needs, but ODFW has not yet been funded to be part of these planning efforts. To ensure that rivers, fish, and wildlife are considered in planning, ODFW needs to be included.
- Support proactive habitat restoration for ESA-listed salmon and steelhead (POP 116). Without appropriate funding, work to restore and enhance habitat for at-risk salmon and steelhead populations will be delayed or unimplemented. Oregon cannot afford to fall behind on safeguarding habitat for endangered salmon.

Anti-poaching campaign: We urge you to restore funding to ODFW's anti-poaching campaign. To proactively address poaching and reduce the number of illegally killed fish and wildlife, including at-risk populations of trout and steelhead, ODFW needs this funding reinstated.

We are also encouraged by the funding allocated to better incorporate environmental justice issues throughout the Natural Resource agencies, including the creation of an Office of Environmental Justice in the Department of Environmental Quality, the creation of DEI positions in multiple agencies, and a commitment to incorporate environmental justice analysis measures in land use decisions. We ask that the Committee ensure these items are fully funded.

The Southern Resident orcas are living on the brink of extinction. Without bold, comprehensive action to address the threats facing these orcas, especially restoring salmon, we risk losing these iconic whales. We ask that you please fund these critical programs as part of a coordinated, region-wide effort to protect and restore salmon in the Southern Residents' range, helping these iconic orcas survive. Thank you for your consideration, and please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Regards,



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