



THEODORE ROOSEVELT CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP

To guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish

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Testimony Before Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Subject: HB 5009 – Relating to the Financial Administration of the State Department of Fish and Wildlife

Co-Chair Senator Taylor, Co-Chair Representative Reardon and members of the Committee,

My name is Michael O’Casey, and I am the Oregon Field Representative for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP). Inspired by the legacy of Theodore Roosevelt, the mission of the TRCP is to *guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish* by uniting and amplifying our partners’ voices to strengthen policy for fish and wildlife habitat and enhance public access to quality hunting and fishing opportunities. We work with 60 organizational partners and 117,000 members nationwide. The TRCP is providing testimony in support HB 5009 relating to the 2021-23 biennial budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Specifically, I wanted to highlight two recommendations related to ODFW’s 21-23 budget.

Policy Option Package 112:

POP 112 would restore a focus on habitat which is key to the game and non-game species all Oregonians rely on. The TRCP **strongly supports** the allocation of funding necessary to establish a Habitat Division. Funding for this new Habitat division has been included as a priority in both the Governor’s Recommended Budget and through the agency. According to ODFW establishing this new division will, “benefit Oregon’s lands and waters, and in turn will positively impact the health of Oregon’s fish and wildlife populations.”

More than 50% of Oregon’s 61 million acres are federally owned public lands. ODFW currently lacks the capacity to proactively respond to and participate in the many efforts to manage habitat on this vast swath of publicly owned lands that provide critical habitat to the species that ODFW manages. Bringing ODFW staff together within a single division and filling key resource and field-based position gaps will allow the agency to be better equipped to work with other state and federal agencies in order to promote habitat health and restoration across Oregon’s diverse landscape.

POP 112 sought General Funds for a new division administrator and executive support specialist along with five new regional habitat biologists to provide new and critical capacity to focus on habitat issues within each watershed. Unfortunately, the Governor’s Recommended Budget proposed to fund only the two administrative positions using unspecified federal dollars. The TRCP feels strongly that this new division needs to be funded through general fund dollars and that the five proposed field-based positions be included. By using general fund dollars, all Oregonians will help to fund this new division that benefits all species in our state and the five field-based positions are critical to ensure this new division is able to achieve its goals and mission.

Minam Property Acquisition:

The TRCP also **strongly supports** the Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition. The TRCP recently completed a study in partnership with OnX maps to identify public lands in the west that are ‘landlocked’ or inaccessible to the public. Through the study, we identified more than 9 million acres that are publicly owned but have no legal permanent access to them by the public. The acquisition of key parcels that improve and/or expand access to our nations public

lands is a priority for TRCP and the sportsmen and women we represent. The TRCP applauds the dedication by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, in partnership with ODFW, to spearhead this exciting land acquisition opportunity.

Another priority for the TRCP is improving connectivity of landscape scale habitat to ensure the migration routes and winter range for big game are conserved long into the future. The acquisition of more than 15,000 acres through this purchase would permanently conserve key winter range and movement corridors for the thriving elk herds in the region and reduce challenges such as landowner damage nearby by providing additional lower elevation habitat for herds to winter on. The purchase of this property will also help to ensure more habitat remains available for Northeast Oregon's struggling mule deer population.

This property would not only benefit big game and hunters. It would provide secure habitat for threatened steelhead and salmon as well as hundreds of other species of flora and fauna. Additionally, it would provide for new areas of backcountry style recreation to hikers, boaters, and birders alike. The TRCP requests that this committee commit to appropriate the necessary funds in this budget cycle to ensure this once in a generation opportunity is not missed and that this new wildlife area becomes a reality in this biennium to benefit all Oregonians.

In closing, the TRCP appreciates the hard work of this committee and all legislators for their hard work during this challenging year. Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for ODFW's budget to establish the necessary funds for a new Habitat Division and our interest in approving the funds needed to acquire the exceptional Minam River Property.

Sincerely,



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