



Testimony to the Joint Committee on Capitol Construction on HB 5202

To: Co-Chair Senator Fred Girod
Co-chair Representative Paul Holvey
Members of the Sub-Committee
Fr: David Moskowitz, The Conservation Angler
Dt: February 28, 2022
Re: HB 5202 and Oregon's Fish Hatchery System

Good morning Co-chairs Senator Girod and Representative Holvey and members of the Committee, I am David Moskowitz with The Conservation Angler (TCA), a nonprofit wild fish conservation organization.

We congratulate you and your colleagues for your hard work in spending combined federal and state funds for the benefit of Oregon and Oregonians across the state on exceptional projects and needs.

I wish to speak to an additional dire need for state financial administration attention – a comprehensive evaluation and study of Oregon's 100-year investment in fish hatcheries so the existing system can make the pivot to survive the next 100 years.

In 2017, Oregon's hatchery deferred maintenance backlog estimate was \$90 million. The Legislature has approved bonding for capital projects to address the backlog twice at \$10 million each.

However, wildfire Losses in 2020 of state hatchery facilities were around \$30 million.

Hatchery Repair projects completed in 2020 totaled five 5 projects with an expenditure of \$313,029.

Oregon's hatchery system is failing and there is no end in sight.

Most facilities are older than 50 years.

ODFW has never implemented the recommendations from the Independent Multi-disciplinary Science Team (IMST) Report nor Federal recommendations from the Hatchery Science Review Group (HSRG).

In terms of federal review, Oregon has work do to as well. Fifteen hatchery programs have no ESA coverage from NOAA, eight hatchery programs have NOAA approvals that are more than 10 years old and seven hatchery programs have NOAA approvals that are 5 to 9 years old.

The Oregon hatchery system must be operated to reduce the impact on wild, natural populations impacts that continue to confirm long-term and at times irreversible impacts on wild stocks.

The Oregon hatchery system must be operated under a best-practices, or even a do-no-harm management regime.

Further, the true costs of the hatchery system have never been evaluated in a proper economically sound manner to assess whether the cost is worth the benefit in terms of providing a calculable return on investment.

The impact of climate change on the hatchery system was clearly felt in September 2020. Oregon's system faces severe challenges in wildfire vulnerability, water source and system problems and the

concurrent likelihood that warmer water and less water will increase the probability for disease, pathogens and bacteria reducing hatchery productivity while increasing costs for mitigating these issues and harming wild populations.

Oregon's current hatchery system violates state and federal water quality standards on a daily and ongoing basis across the state.

Now, the investment in hatchery infrastructure is crumbling and neither the federal or state government, or private parties such as utility companies, have a plan to address the deferred maintenance backlog of likely over \$100 million – a figure that itself becomes out of date with each passing day.

Climate Change impacts alone demand a response, as the changes in the marine environment are evident across the entire Pacific Ocean – and the loss of ocean productivity affects the survival of both wild and hatchery salmon when these fish enter the salt water.

The massive hatchery production of chum, sockeye, and pink salmon internationally and in Alaska threatens the entire ocean food web – the excessive releases of hatchery fish in the North Pacific is likely the principal source of recent steep declines in steelhead returns from British Columbia south to the Umpqua River.

The ocean pasture has been grazed down to the nubs – Oregon farmers can tell you what happens to the animals and to the landscape when there are too many animals on the grass.

Oregon's investment in hatcheries is at risk. The Legislature should act now to begin the long-term transition for this system. There must be a complete and comprehensive evaluation and assessment of hatchery infrastructure and its performance.

Oregon is flying blind while operating a failing and outdated system – one that built on misconceptions during a different time. The hatchery system is almost quaint – it harkens back to a time when we believed we could dam the rivers, cut the forests and dike the wetlands and still have salmon and steelhead returning to supply over-built sport, tribal and commercial fisheries like the good ol' days – fisheries which have become very effective and more advanced and better at catching these fish.

Times have changed.

An outline of a study plan has been developed and could form the basis for this desperately needed task.

This body, in 2022, could appropriate \$1 to \$2 million for a third-party, completely independent scientific and economic review of Oregon's Fish Hatchery system lead by the Department of Administrative Services while consulting with the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the public.

The hatchery system started in 1877 on the Clackamas River and has steadily grown. It is time to measure its impacts, costs, benefits, and ability to withstand the uncertainty of climate change and further reduce its impacts our wild salmon and steelhead.

Our Testimony includes an attachment for your consideration:

[Proposal to fund an Independent Hatchery System Review: Best Practices, Climate Change Resiliency, Economic Effectiveness](#)