



# Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

## Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Senator Michael Dembrow, Co-Chair  
Representative Khanh Pham, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Natural Resources  
900 Court Street NE  
Room H-178  
Salem, OR 97301



Dear Co-Chairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Fish and Wildlife, our budget, and highlights from the Habitat and Wildlife Divisions during Day 1 of our budget hearing. Below is our response to the requests for the number of Columbia River gillnet permit holders and number of Areas of Known Wolf Activity (AKWA) from Representative Levy, as well as information in response to Senator Frederick's interest in the status of greater sage-grouse populations and collaborative work in sagebrush habitats.

### **Columbia River gillnet permits**

There are 273 Columbia River Gillnet vessel permits eligible to be active for 2023, that are licensed and permitted by ODFW to engage in the fishery. There were 275 active permits in 2022. The number of active permits has been slowly declining over the past 30 years (370 active permits in 1987).

As required by ORS 508.778, no new Columbia River Gillnet vessel permits are being issued. Thus, the total number of permits declines if permit holders do not annually renew. Permits may be transferred to new vessels by request to the department. Vessel permit transfer requests must include signatures by each party that holds security interest in the vessels associated with the transfer and must include the permit transfer fee of \$100.

The latest information from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) indicates that there are 70 active permits for the Columbia River gillnet fishery issued in Washington, which is down from 240 in 2022. The recent reduction in number of permits is due to a "buy-back" program.

### **Areas of Known Wolf Activity**

There were 34 Areas of Known Wolf Activity (AKWAs) statewide in 2022. These AKWAs are identified publicly on our website. Of these, 17 are predominantly found in Representative Levy's district.

### **Status of greater sage-grouse**

The 2022 population of greater sage-grouse is estimated at 17,508 individuals. The spring breeding population of sage-grouse in 2022 in Oregon increased by 9.9% from 2021. This is the third year of statewide population increase, following three consecutive years of decline (2017-19). In 2022, nine new leks (breeding locations) were located by helicopter and confirmed by ground surveyors. Additionally, several potential new leks were located by helicopter in spring 2022 and will be confirmed on the ground during this year's sage-grouse breeding season counts. While the population increase is welcome news, the population continues to experience an overall decline and is well below the 2003 baseline population of 29,327 individuals.

Habitat loss and degradation is the major cause of sage-grouse decline in Oregon. Data collected by SageCon estimates that about 40 partner organizations invested over \$78 million in conservation actions in Oregon rangelands that has achieved 1.1 million acres of invasive annual plant treatment, 251,000 acres of juniper abatement, and 207,000 acres of other threats treated. Partners are focused on building ecological resilience in the sagebrush ecosystem.

Collaboration happens at the local level with five Local Implementation Teams (LITs; Baker, Prineville, Vale, Burns, and Lakeview), all of which are actively working to identify their priority areas of concern and streamline conservation efforts. Sage-Grouse Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) provide an incentive to private landowners to proactively manage for the benefit of sage-grouse and sagebrush rangeland health. Nearly 600,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat on private lands have been enrolled in CCAAs between 2015 and 2022 in Crook, Lake, Harney, Malheur, and Baker counties.

Oregon Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) protect 91% of sage-grouse core habitat. Oregon's 24 RFPAs primarily consist of local landowners who volunteer and respond rapidly to incidents during fire season. Through a collaboration between ODF, BLM, USFWS and local landowners, RFPAs have minimized large wildfires in sage-grouse habitat in recent years.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Committee's questions. Please contact me if I may provide additional information.

Sincerely,



Curtis E. Melcher  
Director  
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife