



January 19, 2023

Re: NFS opposes HB 2184 in its current form; endorses further consideration—with ODFW consultation—of methods to improve agency discretion and flexibility when managing for bass

Chair Helm and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water,


Native Fish Society¹ submits these comments in relation to HB 2184 regarding the management of bass populations in the Coquille River. Bass are an introduced and invasive fish which have come to flourish in rivers and waterbodies across the state. They are also voracious predators of native fish, often consuming juvenile resident and migratory species including salmon and steelhead. In many places, bass have been identified as a factor limiting the conservation and recovery of important native fish populations.

Managing bass populations more effectively has become a focus of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW), tribal nations, and angling and conservation groups. Efforts are underway in some watersheds to actively remove bass with the goal of reducing bass populations substantially enough to benefit native fish. The Coquille River is one area where this effort has received great focus and resource allocation.

HB 2184 seeks to add to this effort by implementing a bounty program of \$5 per bass harvested from the Coquille River. While we appreciate the concept, Native Fish Society doesn't believe that it is the most effective or efficient use for funds directed at this problem (ODFW policy option package 118 currently seeks funding to implement a strategic research, monitoring, and removal plan for bass in the Coquille). Running a bounty program will be costly both in staff capacity and in bounty payments (it's easy in some areas to catch a hundred or more bass in a single day). There's also the issue of being unable to verify that a bass returned for bounty has been harvested from the Coquille River as bass inhabit most waterbodies in southern Oregon.

Instead of legislating new programs tailored to a specific watershed, we believe it would be most effective for the committee to work with ODFW staff to devise legislative language which will give the department greater discretion and flexibility to manage bass populations around the state where they are found to be impacting the conservation and recovery of native fish. We believe the relating-to clause of HB 2184 is sufficiently broad to be redrafted with a focus on giving the department the ability to waive statutory requirements that protect species designated as gamefish, like bass, when such species impair the conservation and recovery of native fish populations.

Sincerely,


Jennifer Fairbrother
Conservation Director

¹ The Native Fish Society is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to restore abundant wild fish, free-flowing rivers, and thriving local communities across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest.