

February 28, 2023

Senator Elizabeth Steiner and Representative Tawna Sanchez
Joint Chairs of Ways and Means
Oregon State Legislature
900 Court St. N.E.
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Steiner and Chair Sanchez:

I am writing this letter in support of SB-5509 (Governor's Recommended Budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife). The Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB) affects a broad and diverse approach of natural resource management in Oregon. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) administration has demonstrated the wise use of fiscal resources to manage Oregon's fish and wildlife for present and future generations. Further, I would like to encourage the Ways and Means Committee to move forward with two Policy Option Packages (POPs).

•POP121: Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition.

Phase I was completed in November 2021 and POP121 is requesting approval for ODFW to seek \$9,755,000 in Federal Limitation to acquire Phase II. Approval of POP121 will add 10,962 acres to the 4,609 acres purchased in Phase I. ODFW and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation have built a strong coalition of over 50 entities, including the Union and Wallowa County Commissions to support the purchase. Completing Phase II will protect critical big game winter range and add six miles of public access along the Minam Wild and Scenic River. Completing Phase II prevents the area from being developed into small parcels, and maintains an important migratory corridor for big game. Enclosed is a description of the Minam River Wildlife area acquisition.

•POP137: Stop Poaching General Fund Transfer

The 2019 legislature approved a three pronged approach to increase awareness of poaching and the negative impacts on fish and wildlife populations. The 2019 anti-poaching program included a public outreach position at ODFW, additional troopers at the Oregon State Police, and a Stop Poaching prosecutor position at the Department of Justice. POP 137 is proposing to move General Fund appropriation from ODFW to the Department of Justice (DOJ) to fund the prosecutor, thus streamlining funding for the position based at DOJ.

As a member of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife External Budget Advisory Committee I am requesting your support of SB-5509.

Best Regards,

S. Craig Ely 
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ROCKY MOUNTAIN
ELK FOUNDATION

MINAM RIVER WILDLIFE AREA ACQUISITION

WALLOWA AND UNION COUNTIES, OREGON



PROJECT FACTS

PROJECT SIZE

- 15,573 +/- Acres
- Phase I: 4,609 Acres (closed Nov 2021)
- Phase II: 10,964 Acres (expect to close Dec 2023)

PURCHASE PRICE

(Subject to appraisal update for 2023)

- 2020 Appraised Value: \$18,700,000
- Phase I Value: \$5,508,354
- Phase II Value: \$13,191,646

FUNDING

- Phase I: Pittman-Robertson Funds, RMEF, and others
- Phase II: Forest Legacy Program, RMEF, and others (anticipated)

PARTNERS

- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW)
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF)
- Manulife Investment Management's timberland business (formerly Hancock Natural Resource Group)
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

LOCATION

- Property is along the Minam River, primarily in Wallowa County with a small portion in Union County.
- Property is adjacent to the existing ODFW Minam River Wildlife Area, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) Minam State Recreation Area, USFS Eagle Cap Wilderness, and Bureau of Land Management lands.

LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT

- Managed by ODFW as part of existing State Wildlife Area lands, in partnership with Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF).
- Continued management as a "working landscape," with active forest management and grazing used as a tool to improve and maintain wildlife habitat.

LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY

The Minam River Wildlife Area Acquisition will link wildlife habitat from the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest and the federally-designated Eagle Cap Wilderness Area to the Minam State Recreation Area at the confluence of the Minam and Wallowa Wild and Scenic Rivers. The property includes numerous Oregon Conservation Strategy habitats and species, federal and state listed species, and species of local economic and cultural importance. Active habitat management on the property will allow various wildlife species to move across elevation gradients, enhancing the resilience of existing populations in the face of climate variability.

CRUCIAL BIG GAME WINTER RANGE

Permanent protection of crucial winter, year-round, and transitional habitat along a migration corridor for elk, mule deer, and other wildlife.

ANADROMOUS FISH AND AQUATIC RESOURCES

Acquisition of the property will conserve approximately 114 miles of perennial and intermittent streams, including a significant stretch of the Minam River, providing spawning, rearing and migration habitat for Snake River spring/summer-run Chinook salmon (federal and state threatened) and Snake River Basin steelhead (federal threatened), Grande Ronde bull trout (federal threatened), and Pacific lamprey (state sensitive). As a result of cooperative reintroduction efforts, ODFW and tribal co-managers were excited to document coho salmon redds (nests) in the Minam River in 2021, after a 40-year absence. The National Marine Fisheries Service's Snake River Recovery Plan calls for the conservation of pristine tributary habitat for Chinook salmon and steelhead and identifies the Minam River as one of the primary tributaries impacting the Grande Ronde population groups.

PUBLIC ACCESS FOR RECREATION

Acquisition will secure 15,573 acres of public recreational access, improve access to more than 6,000 acres of adjacent National Forest lands, and open new access to 40 acres of landlocked Bureau of Land Management lands. Hunters, anglers, backpackers, horse packers, wildlife viewers and other recreationists will have access to a remote, rugged landscape. Outdoor enthusiasts will have improved access to the Eagle Cap Wilderness and the existing trail network on the National Forest lands, including the Minam River Trail which traverses the property.

Recreational opportunities are easily accessible due to the property's location along the Highway 82 Hells Canyon Scenic Byway.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

- Formal outreach and information to local officials, the public and tribes generated widespread support for the project.
 - Over fifty entities and individuals expressed support for the Minam Acquisition's Forest Legacy proposal.
- Positive economic impact on rural economies due to outdoor recreation spending, as well as economic contributions from maintaining livestock grazing and forestry on the property.
- As with other state owned wildlife areas, ODFW will pay fees "in-lieu" of property taxes to maintain county tax revenues.

FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION, CONTACT:

BILL RICHARDSON, RMEF SENIOR CONSERVATION PROGRAM MANAGER - WESTERN
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THE MISSION OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK FOUNDATION IS TO ENSURE THE FUTURE OF ELK, OTHER WILDLIFE, THEIR HABITAT AND OUR HUNTING HERITAGE.