



## **Testimony to the Joint Subcommittee on Ways and Means for Natural Resources: HB 5509**

The Conservation Angler (TCA) is a non-profit organization focused on the management of harvest and hatchery practices to support the conservation and restoration of wild fish and wild rivers. TCA participated in the public process for ODFW's 2023-2025 budget. Our organization is a member of the agency's External Budget Advisory Committee (EBAC), and TCA engaged in the EBAC meetings and other stakeholder meetings held over the past year related to crafting the next biennium's budget.

SB 5509 appropriates money from the General Fund to the State Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for certain biennial expenses. TCA supports providing funding for several programs in the Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB), but we also recommend adding funds for a few key ODFW initiatives that are not in the GRB.

The GRB includes a number of policy option packages (POPs) from ODFW's agency request budget that TCA supported during the ODFW budget-building process, specifically the following POPs:

- A. 124 – Salmonid Forecasting and Habitat Models
- B. 125 – Rogue South Coast Steelhead Monitoring
- C. 130 – Fish Passage Restoration - Culverts

There are critical ODFW programs not funded in the GRB that we recommend adding:

- A. Klamath Salmon Restoration (POPs 109 and 119 in the ARB)

TCA believes that Oregon must have a funding for an ODFW fisheries biologist focused on the Klamath salmon reintroduction effort. The current biologist is an important member of the team of state, federal and tribal biologists who will aid in the restoration of salmon and steelhead into Oregon once the Klamath Dams are removed. The imminent removal of the Klamath dams will be the largest river restoration project in American history. ODFW must at least be funded to allow the current staff to play an important role in returning wild salmon and steelhead into the Oregon portion of the Klamath River.

This position is critical to remain connected to the multi-party investment in watershed restoration. The state of Oregon will allow natural repopulation of the upriver habitat by wild salmon and steelhead for all species other than spring chinook for up to 20 years (3 chinook life-cycles) after dam removal). TCA supports wild re-colonization because it will be the best approach for the upper basin, but Oregon must retain the biologist who has been on the ground throughout the watershed restoration process.

- B. Fish Passage Program Capacity (POPs 101 and 116 in the ARB)

In recent years, Oregon has asked ODFW's fish passage program staff to do more with less. At the same time, the massive federal infrastructure bills and funding opportunities make available huge amounts of fish passage funding in the immediate future, but we must give ODFW the necessary capacity to apply for and secure these Federal funds for work in Oregon.

With the increasing workload, ODFW's fish passage program has not received additional capacity in recent sessions as the ODFW fish passage program lost a position in 2021. POP 101 would have restored funding to the NRS 3 Assistant Fish Passage Coordinator position. Similarly, the federal dollars for fish passage will require significant historical and archaeological resource review, but ODFW's fish passage program does not possess that capacity inhouse. POP 116 would have provided funding for a Cultural and

Historic Resource Specialist to help ODFW to implement fish passage restoration projects at a level equal to the significant available Federal funding.

### 3. Habitat and Water Programs (POP 107 in the ARB)

TCA strongly supports the Habitat Division and its water program, which is responsible for studying, safeguarding, and restoring habitat and streamflows in Oregon's rivers. We urge the Subcommittee not to make any cuts to the water program, and to support funding for related POP 107 which would have established 3 FTE positions in Habitat Division: a Water Planning Coordinator, an Instream Flow Biologist, and a Water Rights Coordinator. TCA believes this funding request is essential to supporting Habitat Division's important work on instream flow restoration and aquatic habitat monitoring – items that benefits ALL Oregonians.

In particular ODFW's Water Program plays a vital role in protecting water in our state's iconic rivers. Adequate funding of ODFW's Water Program is essential to meet the many instream recommendations of the state's Integrated Water Resources Strategy. Whether it's working to protect water instream, prioritizing streamflow restoration efforts statewide, working in basin collaborative groups, helping develop water policy or working with OWRD to solve complex regional water issues.

To support this work TCA respectfully requests the following of the Natural Resource Subcommittee:

- ✓ Protect ODFW's Water Program from cuts: With climate change upon us, the work of this program is more important than ever.
- ✓ Fund ODFW POP 107, Integrated Water Solutions: Policy Option Package 107 would fund 3 ODFW positions to work on Integrated Water Resources Solutions, including Place Based Planning and other regional collaboratives. Without ODFW participation in regional water forums, regional plans will be severely compromised, and risk not meeting statutory standards to meet instream needs.
- ✓ Fund ODFW POP 110, Statewide Stream Temperature Modeling which is essential to understanding stream temperatures and how they affect Oregon's iconic species, including federally listed salmon and steelhead.

Almost all of nineteen of Oregon's river basins are already over appropriated from the late spring to the early fall. All the while, population growth and climate change are increasing pressures on Oregon's rivers and other aquatic habitats. Oregon's fish and other aquatic species across the state are imperiled and climate change will only make the challenges Oregon's aquatic species are facing more intense and harder to be resilient.

In the face of these increasing pressures, protection of Oregon's fish and wildlife, and the habitats they depend on, is more important than ever. TCA urges the Ways and Means Committee to protect the Water Program from cuts a further invest in these POPS in concert with Water Watch of Oregon, Trout Unlimited and Wild Salmon Center.

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