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Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony in support of SB 5509: Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget

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Co-Chair Dembrow, Co-Chair Pham, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of SB 5509, the budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for the 2023-25 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is a driver of Oregon's conservation strategy, overseeing Oregon's engagement in maintaining the health of species across the state in marine reserves and rocky shores, forests and wetlands, and grasslands and the sagebrush steppe. ODFW needs adequate funding to carry out its statewide mission.

TNC would like to express our support of the following funding items, as you consider ODFW's budget for the upcoming biennium:

**Support Programs and Policy Option Packages included in the Governor's Recommended Budget including:**

- **POP 105 – Private Forest Accord Development (PFA).** TNC supports funding to enable ODFW to continue the implementation of HB 4055 (2022) and the historic agreements reached through the PFA, including the habitat mitigation grant program.
- **POP 112 – Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF).** Continued investment in the OCRF, including funding for a permanent coordinator position, is critical to support OCRF's goals of connecting Oregonians to their natural landscapes. OCRF funds innovative projects that protect and enhance the species and habitats identified in the Oregon Conservation Strategy.
- **POP 123 – Coquille Valley Wildlife Area Biologist.** This position is critical in conducting habitat restoration, maintenance, monitoring, and developing public access to the Coquille Valley Wildlife Area, while collaborating with state and federal partners on habitat-related projects.

**Support for the following programs and POPs not included in the GRB:**

- **Marine Reserves Program.** TNC supports full allocation of ODFW's Marine Reserves Program by reinstating the \$187,000 per biennium for the Communications Project Leader of the ODFW

Marine Reserves Program and provide additional investments in the program (\$800,000) by passing [HB 2903](#). This moderate investment will pay significant dividends in developing science that informs decision-making, develops an adaptive management plan, and enhances outreach and engagement activities for Oregonians.

- **POP 104 – Marine Life Entanglement.** TNC supports funding for a permanent position that monitors Oregon’s Dungeness crab fisheries and reduces the risk of marine entanglement in fisheries operations. This position provides capacity for ODFW to develop a monitoring and adaptive management plan that would support the upcoming federal Incidental Take Permit and associated Conservation Plan, minimizing the risk of whale and turtle entanglement in fishing gears while providing for maximized crab fisheries.
- **POP 107 – Integrated Water Resources Solutions (IWRS).** TNC supports funding three ODFW positions to benefit instream flow restoration projects and water planning. Increased coordination between ODFW and Oregon Water Resources Department is necessary to incorporate fish and wildlife needs in future planning efforts ([HB 3163](#)).
- **POP 110 – Statewide Stream Temperature Monitoring.** Continued investment in this program will help the state prioritize future ecological protections and increase understanding on the importance of cold-water refuge for salmon survival in times of drought and under future projected climate conditions.
- **Real-time river flow and temperature gauging network.** TNC supports \$750,000 per biennium to bolster the monitoring network as envisioned in the 2022 drought resilience package. This funding would provide necessary operations and maintenance services for long-term management of ODFW’s expanding river flow and temperature gage network and would allow for 15 new stream gages in drought-impacted basins.
- **POP 114—Climate Change Policy Implementation.** TNC supports ODFW’s continued commitment to mitigating climate impacts in coordination with other state and federal agencies. POP 114 adds capacity for ODFW to work across agencies to further integrate and advance goals of the Climate and Ocean Change Policy. ODFW’s technical assistance on renewable energy siting projects is essential for ensuring that renewable energy development is well-sited, adequately mitigated, and responsibly operated. We urge the state to invest in increasing agency capacity to implement programs, leverage federal funding opportunities, administer grants, monitor programs, and take necessary steps to advance climate action.

TNC is committed to working with ODFW to ensure the agency has the necessary funding, the position authority, and the staff capacity to manage and implement these critical programs. Thank you for your consideration and your continued attention to the needs of Oregon’s natural environments.