



February 7, 2024

To: House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources, and Water  
Oregon State Legislature

Dear Chair Helm and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 4132, which requires the State Department of Fish and Wildlife, the State Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Department of State Lands to implement the Ocean Policy Advisory Council recommendations to develop an adaptive management and social monitoring program to support marine reserves—and provide funding for the implementation of the recommendations.

The marine reserve system is already an Oregon success story. In the past decade, the marine reserves have demonstrated their worth. They have proven highly popular with both the statewide and coastal populations. Awareness of the reserves and of Oregon's marine resources among Oregonians and coastal visitors has increased dramatically. The reserves are a draw for both visitors and volunteers—nearly 13,000 individuals, many of them from our organization's CoastWatch program, have engaged in some form of citizen science helping to monitor the reserves and gather data about them. The reserves have contributed to research in important ways, and protected habitat, while having little to no impact on the state's fishing industry.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Marine Reserves Program has engaged many partners in monitoring and managing the reserves, from scientists and other experts, to the fishing community, to local communities and businesses on the coast. More and more Oregonians are developing a strong sense of connection to these places, and through them to Oregon's nearshore ocean.

The marine reserves, at a modest cost, are a significant investment in Oregon's future. They will continue to be vital to marine research, providing all-important comparison areas for studies of the nearshore ocean and its resources. Studies in the reserves will contribute knowledge to fisheries management, and help to track the effects of climate change (such as ocean acidification and hypoxia), invasive species, and population shifts (such as those caused by the epizootic of sea star wasting syndrome). And all the while, the reserves will contribute to the resilience of marine ecosystems by providing protected habitat areas.

Despite widespread public support, and against the recommendations of the Ocean Advisory Policy Council, the Oregon legislature cut community engagement staffing from the program in addition to a 30% budget cut in 2023. We urge legislative approval of all funding and investment in

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the Marine Reserve program included in HB 4132 and the reinstatement of this community engagement requirement. This investment is critical to enhance the program's benefits to our coastal communities through meaningful community engagement with ocean stakeholders and users (including fishermen), as the Marine Reserve Program was initially envisioned.

Maintaining the benefits of the marine reserves is clearly in Oregon's best interest. But the bill does more than that. It requires implementation of a set of recommendations from the Ocean Policy Advisory Council, which are in turn based on a thorough analysis of the reserve system to date by researchers associated with Oregon State University. These recommendations call for development of an adaptive management plan, which will lead to careful, ongoing analysis of the reserves, their effects, and the research they are making possible. An adaptive management plan will assure management that maximizes the benefits of the reserves, and also assure the continued engagement of coastal communities and stakeholders in assessing the functioning of the reserves and the value they are delivering for Oregonians. With this legislation, the reserves' second decade will build and improve upon the first and ensure decisions made about our marine resources and ocean uses are based on the best available science.

We urge your support for HB 4132 and its fiscal ask, both in committee and in advocating for the bill as it continues through the legislative process.

Sincerely,

*Annie Merrill*

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