



# American Fisheries Society Oregon Chapter

OR Chapter AFS: PO Box 8062 Portland, OR 97207-8062 [www.orafs.org](http://www.orafs.org)

Date: March 3, 2025

## **RE: OREGON CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 3580: ESTABLISHES A TASK FORCE ON EELGRASS RESOURCES**

Co-Chairs Rep. Helm and Owens and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture, Land Use, Natural Resources and Water

The Oregon Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (ORAFS) comprises over 500 fisheries and aquatics science professionals from federal, state, and tribal agencies, colleges and universities, diverse private employers, college students, and retirees. ORAFS was established in 1964 as a chapter of the American Fisheries Society. Our mission is to improve the conservation and sustainability of Oregon fishery resources and their aquatic ecosystems for long-term public benefit by advancing science, education and public discourse concerning fisheries and aquatic science and by promoting the development of fisheries professionals.

We offer our strong support for HB 3580 for the following key reasons:

- 1) Oregon's estuarine eelgrass meadows are essential habitat for multiple species of fish, shellfish and wildlife. Eelgrass is a unique aquatic vascular plant and eelgrass beds provide multiple ecological services and are indicators of ecosystem health. The beds are nursery areas for commercially and recreationally important marine and anadromous fish and macroinvertebrate species. Eelgrass meadows provide habitat for algae, bottom organisms, and swimming animals that serve as the food base for commercially and recreationally important fish and macroinvertebrates. The annual spawning of herring in eelgrass beds along the Oregon Coast is one of the amazing wonders of synchronous biological cycles. In Oregon, protection and management of eelgrass is structured within the Statewide Planning Goal 16 for Estuarine Resources.
- 2) Eelgrass beds are important for carbon sequestration that can rival that of terrestrial forests. The filtering effect of the beds improves water quality and buffers the effects of the climate crisis and ocean acidification. Because of their ecosystem services, eelgrass beds have various levels of protection within U.S. waters. Nonetheless, eelgrass communities and the ecosystem services they provide are at risk from contaminants from overland runoff, habitat modifications, dredging, boat grounding and anchoring, non-native species introductions, overwater structures, marine heat waves, and sea level rise. Recent coastwide assessments have recommended the need for more standardized approaches to data collection to aid and enhance our knowledge of ecosystem services and values of eelgrass habitats along the U.S. coasts.

HB 3580 would set up a Task Force of key representatives with expertise in our coastal communities and estuarine and nearshore resources. The Task Force would set conservation targets through a collaborative effort involving representatives from key agencies, Tribes, scientists, local communities, seafood and aquaculture industries, and recreational fishers. This bill is the first essential step to proactively share information and work to reduce habitat loss and improve data sharing and collaboration. The proposed group would bring together a wide range of expertise and increase everyone's understanding of the challenges and articulate the benefits provided to the economy by this important ecosystem.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our support for HB 3580. ORAFS is in support of legislation that protects our marine and freshwater resources.

Respectfully,

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