



TO: Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Jennifer Fairbrother, Legislative & Policy Director

DATE: February 2, 2026

SUBJECT: NFS Urges Preservation of Critical ODFW Fish Monitoring Programs

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez and Members of the Committee,

Native Fish Society is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to restore abundant wild fish, free-flowing rivers, and thriving local communities across Oregon and the Pacific Northwest. We urge you to reject the proposed reductions to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) Native Fish Program related to monitoring.

Monitoring is a Key Ingredient in the Recipe for Abundance

At Native Fish Society, we often speak of the "Recipe for Abundance." This isn't theoretical; we have a proven, replicable framework right here in our state. The Oregon Coastal Coho Conservation Plan has driven a landmark recovery, with populations rebounding from near-total collapse in the 1990s to abundances not seen since the 1960s.

This success was achieved through three specific ingredients:

1. Comprehensive habitat protection and restoration.
2. A management focus on wild fish reproduction.
3. **Robust monitoring to guide sustainable fisheries management.**

The proposed monitoring reductions threaten to further reduce or remove the third ingredient for many populations and geographies. Monitoring is not an optional extra—it is the navigation system for recovery. Without the data monitoring provides, the recipe fails. We cannot manage what we do not measure. **Cutting these programs forces the state into one of two unacceptable realities:**

1. **We make precautionary fishery closures and reduce or eliminate hatchery programs because we lack the data to operate them without substantial risk to wild populations, or**
2. **We manage fisheries and hatchery programs blindly and risk the collapse of the very populations we are trying to rebuild.**



Investing in What Works: The Need for ODFW Budget Reform

We recognize the state is facing a significant budget deficit. However, this crisis presents an opportunity to rethink how Oregon invests in its natural resources. We must stop simply funding the status quo and start investing in what works.

Currently, ODFW spends roughly \$1 million every week just to operate state-run hatcheries—costs that cover only food, electricity, and routine operations but do not include the hundreds of millions in deferred maintenance state owned facilities require. These fish factories cannibalize the agency’s budget while often failing to deliver long-term recovery or adequate commercial and recreational angling opportunities.

In contrast, the native fish monitoring programs on the chopping block are comparatively inexpensive yet provide the foundational data required for all fisheries management. It is fiscally irresponsible to cut the low-cost, high-value science that underpins our legal compliance and recovery goals while leaving the high-cost, lower-return hatchery expenditures largely intact.

Instead of cutting the essential eyes and ears of the agency, the legislature should look to reductions in hatchery management and expenses. The proposed **Alesea Hatchery closure (\$478,703, OF Priority #18)** demonstrates that alternatives exist. We urge you to prioritize the Recipe for Abundance—habitat, wild fish, and monitoring—over expensive infrastructure that yields diminishing returns.

ODFW 2025-27 LAB Reduction Proposals of Concern

The following reduction options pose specific, critical risks to fish conservation, recovery, and management.

1. Native Fish Management & Monitoring (010-05)

- **Rogue South Coast Plan Implementation (GF Priority #21)**
 - **Reduction:** \$68,000 GF
 - **Impact:** Oregon’s Native Fish Policy requires management plans. The Rogue South Coast Plan (RSP) relies entirely on robust monitoring. Cutting this funding renders the RSP non-functional, forcing a choice between closing fisheries or allowing potentially unsustainable harvest that threatens self-sustaining populations.



- **Fish Research, Evaluation, Data, and Decision Support (REDD) (LF Priority #3)**
 - **Reduction:** \$65,297 LF (Eliminates two seasonal BSA positions)
 - **Impact:** Eliminates capacity to research stream temperature effects on native fish—data necessary for implementing protective angling regulations as environmental conditions change. This reduces the agency’s ability to make data-driven management decisions for stressed populations.

- **Fish Research, Evaluation, Data, and Decision Support (REDD) (LF Priority #4)**
 - **Reduction:** \$146,291 LF (Eliminates one NRS-2 position)
 - **Impact:** Similar to above Priority #3, this reduces data analysis capacity regarding climate impacts on fish. *Note: This is a filled position; this cut would result in the layoff of current full time staff.*

- **Native Fish Investigations (LF Priority #5)**
 - **Reduction:** \$41,240 LF (Eliminates one seasonal BSA position)
 - **Impact:** Reduces research capacity for native trout, lamprey, and non-game species. This work is critical for preventing ESA listings or improving the status of currently listed species.

- **Upper Willamette Monitoring (OF Priority #15)**
 - **Reduction:** \$18,000 OF
 - **Impact:** Cuts monitoring in the Willamette Basin and Sandy River for ESA-listed salmon and steelhead. This data is legally required to support hatchery programs and inform fisheries management, and recovery/delisting decisions.

- **Coastal Adult Surveys (OF Priority #19)**
 - **Reduction:** \$442,190 OF
 - **Impact:** Eliminates vital data for managing Coho and Chinook fisheries. This may delay or prevent the delisting of Oregon Coast Coho salmon—currently on track to be the first salmon population ever recovered and delisted. *Note: This reduction includes filled positions and would require layoffs.*



2. Hydropower Program (060-30)

- **Hydropower Staffing Reduction (OF Priority #11)**
 - **Reduction:** \$1,476,685 OF (Eliminates 10 positions)
 - **Impact:** The Department would lose the ability to participate in licensing and relicensing with WRD and FERC. This loss of capacity for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation will exacerbate fish and wildlife losses at existing and new hydropower facilities. *Note: This reduction includes filled positions and would require layoffs.*

3. Columbia River Program (010-06)

- **Willamette River Fisheries Monitoring (OF Priority #13)**
 - **Reduction:** \$286,208 OF (Eliminates 4 positions)
 - **Impact:** Severely limits the ability to develop regulations, monitor ESA impact limits, and manage harvest in the lower Willamette River—one of Oregon’s most popular recreational fisheries. *Note: This reduction includes filled positions and would require layoffs.*