



**OREGON CHAPTER OF
THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY**

PO Box 2378
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FROM: The Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society

TO: House Committee on Natural Resources

SUBJECT: Support for HB2600 & HB2913

Chair Witt and committee members,

The Oregon Chapter of the Wildlife Society is writing to express our strong support for HB2600 and HB2913. HB2600 builds on the previously established Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund (OCRF) to create an essential and sustainable funding source for Oregon's fish and wildlife conservation. HB2913 ensures that this important avenue for accepting and allocating funds to implement wildlife conservation remains in place and meets the promises made to constituents in 2019 to provide funds that match donations into OCRF. The continuation of the established funding framework and allocation of predictable and sustained funding is a critical component for continued efforts to implement modern conservation and management principles for Oregon's fish and wildlife.

The Wildlife Society is an international organization founded in 1937, representing nearly 10,000 professionals, including scientists, managers, educators, technicians, planners, consultants, conservation officers, students and others who manage, conserve, and study wildlife populations and habitat. The Oregon Chapter of The Wildlife Society (ORTWS) represents nearly 500 such professionals from many areas of public and private enterprise in Oregon.

Our mission is to promote wise conservation and management of wildlife resources in Oregon by serving and representing natural resource professionals. A central purpose of ORTWS is to support scientifically sound management policies.

Like many other state natural resource agencies, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) contends with an enormous public trust responsibility to manage fish and wildlife and their habitats across private, state, and federal ownership boundaries. Additionally, this duty includes the stewardship of both game and nongame wildlife populations, over 850 species, held in the public trust. Traditionally, funding for management of the public trust has relied largely on revenue generated by hunters and anglers, without substantial support from the general public. The appropriation of 0.025% of the transient lodging tax, or approximately \$1 million per biennium, to OCRF insures that the wildlife and other natural resources that play a major role in attracting visitors and new residents to Oregon are conserved appropriately. Approximately 3.5% of the transient sales tax is drawn from visitors to state campgrounds and other venues that would receive direct benefit from conservation of wildlife. Additionally, visitors that enjoy the wide range of outdoor recreation in the state benefit from and impact wildlife. By applying a small percentage of the transient lodging tax revenue they will also assist in protecting the valuable wildlife and natural resources.

The initial creation of OCRF dedicated \$1 million in funding with the intent to match private

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donations. Due to budget and social challenges that funding was reallocated in 2020. The return of the funding by this legislature would meet the promise made to the many Oregon residents that donated their money, with uncertain futures in the midst of a pandemic, to the fund in support of wildlife conservation in the state. The broad support for OCRF continues to demonstrate the importance of wildlife conservation to the citizens of the state, and an expectation that wildlife and habitat will be conserved effectively and appropriately into the future. That support includes ORTWS members who contributed to a \$10,000 donation, demonstrating their continued commitment to diversifying wildlife conservation funding in both their professional and personal lives.

The need for additional funding for wildlife conservation is well known. In 2017, the Governor's Task Force on Funding for Fish, Wildlife and Related Outdoor Recreation and Education (HB2402) was convened to address this issue and develop funding proposals to produce a sustainable, broad-based revenue source to meet ODFW's current and future conservation challenges. The Task Force recommended that the legislature establish the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund, and dedicate, at a minimum, \$86.9 million per biennium to fulfill the obligations of wildlife management and conservation by ODFW. Although the current funding strategy focuses on re-establishing the promised \$1 million in funding to meet private donations, this is an important step in the process of increasing the capacity of ODFW to implement the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

The Oregon Conservation Strategy is Oregon's [State Wildlife Action Plan](#). These plans serve as the blueprint for conserving our nation's fish and wildlife and preventing species from becoming endangered. Oregon's Strategy was developed by a partnership of numerous agencies, conservation groups, and industry stakeholders and represents a collaborative and proactive strategy for maintaining and restoring Oregon's fish and wildlife and their habitats. Core targets of the Oregon Conservation Strategy include, but are not limited to:

- Monitor and proactively conserve at-risk species
- Maintain and restore critical habitats and the wildlife they support
- Assess and manage the impacts of climate change and wildfire risks
- Assess and manage the impacts of population growth and development pressures on Oregon's wildlife and habitats
- Expand recreational resources, outreach, and other programs, to a broader spectrum of Oregon citizens
- Continue to build and strengthen hunting and fishing opportunities and programs

In order to adequately fund and implement the Oregon Conservation Strategy, ODFW requires new, diversified, and sustainable sources of revenue to supplement existing funding. Continuing the Oregon Conservation and Recreation Fund and providing sustainable, consistent funding is critical to provide the department with a vehicle to receive and expend revenues. These funds must be dedicated to conservation, management, research, habitat improvements, enforcement, outdoor recreation, education and other activities that serve to protect, maintain or enhance the fish and wildlife resources of Oregon. Although the OCRF funding is not, and should not, be reliant upon federal legislation, it is important to recognize the continued efforts to establish more diversified wildlife management funding. Federal legislative efforts continue to pursue

broad conservation funding, including the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, which would provide \$1.3 billion in dedicated funding annually for the implementation of state fish and wildlife agencies' wildlife action plans.

Funds from federal legislation would be distributed to the state fish and wildlife agencies and Oregon would be able to access approximately \$52 million per biennium for implementation of the Oregon Conservation Strategy. The OCRF would play an important role in providing the required matching funds to access funding provided through Recovering America's Wildlife Act.

On behalf of ORTWS Members and Board, thank you for your time and consideration in this matter and please do not hesitate to contact us with questions or to engage further discussion.

Respectfully,

ORTWS Board of Directors

ORTWS Contacts for HB2600 & HB2913:

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