



March 25, 2021  
House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources

House Bill 2386 - Establishing an **Independent Science Review Board**.

Legislators and other branches of Oregon's government are often faced with difficult natural resource and environmental decisions that have large impacts across our state. They are frequently presented with biased science and background information from groups that have a vested interest in the legislation or outcome. Policy makers rarely have the opportunity to have impartial peer reviewed scientific research enabling them to make the best decisions based on the facts. With the looming challenges of climate change, the continued cries for racial and environmental justice, we need sound science that will help create laws and make informed decisions that have long term benefits for all Oregonians.

HB 2386 was drafted in response to the findings in the 2015 **SB 202 taskforce** established to "evaluate and assess" the need for independent scientific review in Oregon. *This task force was created after the prior body that acted as an independent science review board (the Independent Multidisciplinary Science Team) was no longer effective and a new process was needed.*

SB 202 was charged with making recommendations on the following criteria:

1. Assessing the need for independent scientific review in Oregon;
2. Making recommendations on one or more entities that are best situated to conduct or coordinate independent scientific review if taskforce determines need;
3. Making recommendations regarding the structure and function of the recommended entities.

The findings of this taskforce are in an extensive report and were also covered by Dr. Lisa Gains in her informational hearing in this committee on May 14<sup>th</sup> in 2019. I would recommend that everyone take a minute to watch her presentation, but I will share some of the important pieces now:

**Findings of SB 202:**

Oregon would benefit from an Independent Science Review (ISR) process particularly for issues that are multi agency and very complex. The process would:

- Reduce the perception of bias and improve the quality of science used for decision making.
- Provide additional legitimacy, transparency and credibility.
- Help agencies stay abreast with current science and help build relationships with experts in the field.
- Foster a more holistic understanding of the natural resource challenges that take place.



**The task force recommended a three-prong structure; A board, a secretariat and a panel.**

- The Board would provide scientific leadership and oversight, including but not limited to selecting which reviews are undertaken, negotiating the science review questions, and selecting the review-specific ISR panels. *The Board would not independently propose science issues to review.*
- The Secretariat would be an administrative section within the Institute for Natural Resources at Oregon State University. It would be the coordinating arm and backbone of Oregon’s ISR process, advising ISR requestors and providing research, technical and administrative support to the Board and the review-specific panels.
- Review-specific panels would be formed once an ISR question has been reviewed by the Board and Secretariat. Science panels would be put together based on the science question (this way you can get the best scientists to help answer questions).
  - The process of the ISR would go as follows. The Board and the Secretariat would will create a robust system to vet and choose what issues to look at. Through this system they would review ISR questions and would work on creating a timeline as well as a robust scope for the issue during their review. Once they have reviewed the question and believe there are sufficient resources (staff and financial) available to complete the review in a timely manner to the standard expected of the ISR, a science panel is assembled.
  - Once the question has been put in front of a panel, the panel would gather the information needed while also documenting what resources they gather, where they found them, when they found them to ensure complete transparency.

**The ISR will Mitigate Bias by:**

- Producing unbiased conclusions regarding the current understanding of the relevant information, methodology and assumptions relating to that scientific question or issue;
- Includes, as applicable, an assessment of the risks, costs and benefits of potential alternative decisions or policies; and,
- And will be conducted by the reviewers who:
  - **Have little personal stake in the nature of the outcome** of decisions or policies, in terms of financial gain or loss, career advancement, or personal or professional relationships;
  - Can **perform the review tasks free of under influence** by others associated with the decision process;
  - Have demonstrable competence in the subject as evidenced by the formal training and/or experience; and,
  - Should be **required to disclose any potential personal stake or conflict of interest** with respect to the stated question/issue.

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**These findings have served as the guidelines for House Bill 2386 which:**

- o Creates the Oregon Independent Science Review Board.
- o Establishes the Independent Scientific Review Secretariat as an administrative section within the Institute for Natural Resources at Oregon State University
- o Establishes the Independent Scientific Review Fund within the HECC (so it is independent of an institutions oversight).

Having an established process for independent scientific reviews is incredibly important to informing decisions that impact our state. We must continue to protect our state's natural resources while also mitigating the social and environmental impacts that can come from poorly-informed studies.

As the study states **“social and environmental costs and impacts of poorly-informed natural resource policies can be mitigated by bringing the best available relevant science to bear via rigorous, systematic review and synthesis and timely presentation of findings...”**

I urge your to support for HB 2386 to ensure independent science informs our most pressuring natural resources decisions.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul".

Representative Paul Holvey  
Oregon House District 8