



ASSOCIATION OF NORTHWEST STEELHEADERS

P.O. Box 55400 Portland, OR 97238
office@anws.org • (503) 653-4176

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RE: Steelheaders Testimony on Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 2021-2023 Biennium Budget

Dear co-chairs Taylor and Reardon and members of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources:

My name is Betsy Emery. I am the Advocacy and Campaign Manager for the Association of Northwest Steelheaders. Our organization was founded in 1960 and is one of the oldest recreational fishing and conservation non-profit organizations in the Pacific Northwest. We have eight chapters in Oregon and one in Southwest Washington, representing over 800 members and nearly 5,000 supporters dedicated to enhancing and protecting fisheries and fish habitats for today and tomorrow, with a vision of abundant, sustainable fisheries and healthy watersheds.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB 5009, the bill establishing ODFW's biennial budget for 2021-2023. We appreciate the fact that as a Committee, you face resource limitations and are required to make hard choices about which Policy Option Proposals (POPs) can be included in the Department's overall budget. We want to provide input about the specific proposals that are important to our membership and the broader fishing public. To the greatest degree possible, it is important that the good work being done by ODFW and its dedicated staff is supported.

First, we want to highlight the components included in Governor Brown's recommended budget for ODFW that we support. Most notably, we are excited to see the recommended budget include:

- the creation of a **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coordinator** position within the Department, which we believe will advance their retention, recruitment, and reactivation efforts, especially in historically excluded and marginalized communities throughout the State.
- 104 - **Habitat Tools for Oregon Coast and Beyond:** \$222,012 to continue the 1 FTE position that supports development and implementation of tools to model stream flows

and fish species distributions in Oregon. This data is important in ensuring that plans and policies related to fish recovery and habitat needs use the best available science and data.

- **105 – Culvert Fish Passage:** \$2,816,270 to continue the 1 FTE position and support Capital Outlay expenditure limitation to repair culverts used for fish passage. Fish passage is especially important in connecting habitat for migrating salmon, supporting at-risk populations, and restoring habitat quality and integrity. Further, as described during ODFW's testimony last week, there are 1,480 unscreened water diversions currently in the state and this POP is especially important in allowing the Department to keep up with the culvert and fish passage requests generated by ODOT road construction projects.
- **108 – Recreational Fisheries Project Coordinator:** \$275,000 to continue the 1 FTE position to increase capacity for hatchery and fishing access related projects. This position would help improve and construct angling access facilities, including trails, fishing docks and platforms, and ADA facilities, all of which are needed at a number of fishing sites across the State.
- **112 – Habitat Division Establishment:** \$437,790 to realign existing programs and positions to establish a Habitat Division that will focus, realign, and increase resources dedicated to habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement. We also support HB 2913 which would make the Oregon Recreation and Conservation Fund a permanent program and it is our understanding that this program would be housed within the new habitat division.
- **115 – Willamette Basin Complex Water Issues:** \$700,248 to support 3 FTE positions to participate with Oregon Water Resources Department in the Willamette Basin water reallocation effort. These positions would ensure that water reallocation conversations include fish habitat considerations and incorporate best available science and data from the Department.

However, the Department's budget request included a number of items of interest to our organization and the fishing public that unfortunately were not advanced in the Governor's recommended budget. Specifically, we request that the Ways and Means Committee consider providing funding the following priorities:

- **114 – Basin Water Planning & Mitigation Coordination:** \$472,885 to establish 2 FTE positions to engage in and develop solutions for ongoing water management issues, mitigation for new water uses and engagement in local water planning efforts. There are many critical water-planning processes occurring statewide without the Department's meaningful contribution. While other natural resource agencies were provided funding associated with the Integrated Water Resource Strategy (IWRS) to support these efforts, ODFW was not provided any additional support for them to engage. Thus, planning groups and water applicants are currently faced with unmet data and information needs regarding fish and wildlife, particularly around the water quality (e.g., temperature) needs of fish and wildlife. Providing this capacity now is time-sensitive and essential for the state to be effective in statewide water management and implementing the IWRS and the

100-year Water Vision. Providing ODFW capacity to engage in these planning efforts is imperative considering that once these water resources are allocated to support non-fish uses, it will be incredibly difficult to shift water to in-stream and fishery uses.

- **116 – Western Oregon Stream Restoration Program:** \$585,056 to establish 3 FTE positions to implement restoration and enhancement of salmonid habitats in Western Oregon. These positions provide direct technical support to watershed councils and private landowners in restoring and enhancing salmonid habitat across the region, allowing the State to leverage resources and successfully implement measures identified in the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds. This program has been successful in increasing instream habitat complexity, enhancing riparian areas, and improving fish passage, all of which are necessary to improve and restore habitat for at-risk and sensitive runs in western Oregon.
- **121 – Orca Salmon Forage:** \$2,264,310 to produce up to 1 million additional juvenile fish to provide forage for starving Southern Resident Killer Whales. First, given the significant damage to three hatchery facilities, there is a significant need to support hatchery production for both orca and sportfishing opportunities. Many hatcheries are not currently funded at a level to allow them to produce their full permitted amount, and thus there is a lot of opportunity to increase production at existing facilities. Further, we believe that some of this funding could be used to bring some level of production back to the facilities damaged during the Labor Day fires.

Aside from those three priorities that we are particularly interested in, Northwest Steelheaders supports the following POPs identified in the Department's requested budget.

- **103 – Klamath Reintroduction & Monitoring Biologist:** \$269,000 to continue 1 FTE position to assist with the reintroduction of anadromous fish into the Klamath River Basin. Given four of the six dams on the Klamath River are slated to be removed by 2024, restoring fish access to the entire river, it is important to have a position dedicated to gathering pre-removal data and guiding the reintroduction efforts across the Basin. Salmon populations across the Klamath Basin have been decreasing for years and are far from the long-term average the Basin used to see. It is a perfect time to establish a program to reintroduce anadromous fish in the Basin to ensure that the program is ready once the dams are removed and the river is open for fish migration.
- **118 – Wallowa Lake Sockeye Salmon Reintroduction:** \$75,000 to support the Klamath Monitoring Biologist (POP 114) in initiating a pilot project to develop sockeye salmon hatchery broodstock for eventual use in Wallowa Lake. The sockeye run originating at Wallowa Lake was historically a predominant source of nutrition for the Nez Perce Tribe and last year, the Nez Perce Tribe successfully reintroduced sockeye salmon back into Wallowa Lake after an absence of nearly 100 years. Oregon has appropriated \$14 million the reconstruction of the Wallowa Lake Dam, which will include fish passage and make sockeye salmon reintroduction feasible. The reconstruction is currently scheduled to be completed in 2022 and we believe it is important for the State to support the Nez Perce Tribe's goal of a viable sockeye salmon run culminating at Wallowa Lake.

- **120 – Shellfish and Estuary Assessment:** \$675,476 to establish 3 FTE positions to increase capacity in the Shellfish program to meet the need for more frequent stock assessments in major bays and estuaries. This expanded capacity will help the Department meet their goal of ensuring that shellfish operations do not cause undue negative impact to the fish, wildlife and their habitats, and that they do not have adverse impacts to recreational and commercial shellfish use. Further, as the State embarks on updating estuary management plans along the Coast, it is important that the Department has adequate capacity to assist in this effort and ensure that the plans incorporate up-to-date data.
- **122 – Technical Assistance for Tidegate Partnership:** \$375,000 to establish 1 FTE position focusing on tidegate projects by providing technical engineering recommendations and evaluating tidegate designs. The Tidegate partnership is an important program in increasing coordination among various governmental entities and serves as a resource for tidegate owners, watershed councils, soil and water conservation districts in efforts to replace tide gates along the Coast.

Further, considering the significant damage Rock Creek, Leaburg, and Klamath hatcheries sustained as a result of the Labor Day fires in September 2020, we would like to see a sizable increase in funding for capital improvements and maintenance of these facilities. While the Governor’s recommended budget does include a 5% increase in capital improvement funding, it also includes a 1.3% decrease in the Inland Fisheries program area that is responsible for hatchery management and eliminates funding entirely for Rock Creek Hatchery. Per ODFW’s budget testimony last week, they estimate the damage to these hatcheries is greater than \$30 million and are unsure how much or when they will receive funding from insurance and FEMA claims to assist in rebuilding efforts. We would like to see some level of dedicated funding to allow ODFW to begin meaningfully engaging with these communities to develop plans about how to construct new, climate resilient facilities that generate hatchery fish with best available science. Given the significant number of fish these hatcheries generate, the longer they are offline, the fewer fish available for recreational angling in the Rogue, Umpqua, and Willamette Basins. It is imperative for ODFW to rebuild these facilities soon.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify.

Betsy Emery
 Advocacy and Campaign Manager
BEмеры@anws.org

Chris Hager
 Executive Director
CHager@anws.org

Bob Oleson
 Board Member and Volunteer Advocate
BobOleson@hotmail.com

Norm Ritchie
 Board Member and Volunteer Advocate
neritchie1@gmail.com