



## WaterWatch of Oregon Protecting Natural Flows In Oregon Rivers

**HB 5009 –ODFW BUDGET  
Testimony of WaterWatch of Oregon  
By Kimberley Priestley  
Submitted to the Joint Ways and Means Natural Resources Subcommittee  
May 3, 2021**

Founded in 1985, WaterWatch is a non-profit river conservation group dedicated to the protection and restoration of natural flows in Oregon's rivers. We work to ensure that enough water is protected in Oregon's rivers and aquifers to sustain fish, wildlife, recreation and other public uses of Oregon's rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater dependent ecosystems and streams. We also work for balanced water laws and policies. WaterWatch has members across Oregon who care deeply about our rivers, their inhabitants and the effects of water laws and policies on these resources.

**Water Quality and Water Quantity Program (POP 114 and POP 115):** ODFW's Water Program plays a vital role in protecting water in our state's iconic rivers. Adequate funding of ODFW's Water Program is critical to meeting the many instream recommendations of the state's Integrated Water Resources Strategy. Whether it's working to protect water instream, prioritizing streamflow restoration efforts statewide, working in basin collaborative groups, helping develop water policy or working with OWRD to solve complex regional water issues, ODFW's Water Program works to protect aquatic habitat and the fish and wildlife that depend upon this habitat, and in doing such provides an invaluable service to all Oregonians.

ODFW's ARB requested 5 new positions in ODFW's Water Quality and Quantity Program. These were found in POP 115 (Willamette, 3 positions) and POP 114 (Regional/place based planning, 2 positions). WaterWatch supports both of these POPs. That said, POP 115 is in the GRB, POP 114 is not. We would request both these POPS be included in the 2021-23 budget.

- **POP 114, Regional/Placed Based Planning (\$472,885 GF, 2 positions):** Recent planning efforts under the Integrated Water Resources Strategy require Placed Based Planning to meet both instream and out-of-stream needs. Yet, while OWRD, ODA and DEQ all have had funding to have staff at the table over the past few years, the legislature has repeatedly failed to fund ODFW's participation. Without ODFW's involvement, these efforts are severely compromised, and risk not meeting statutory standards to meet instream needs. Not in GRB.
- **POP 115, Willamette Basin Complex Water Issues (\$700,248 GF, 3 positions):** Thirteen federal reservoirs in the Willamette Basin, totaling 1.6 million acre feet of water, are undergoing a federal reallocation of the stored water, adding municipal & industrial and fish & wildlife to the currently authorized use of irrigation. When complete, it will be necessary to quantify and track both live-flow and stored-water releases for new instream rights for fish and wildlife and out-of-stream rights for municipal and agriculture users, and manage who gets access to water during times of shortage. This is a complex implementation challenge requiring additional resources for ODFW to develop implementation plans, overcome technical challenges of quantifying reach specific instream needs, and develop appropriate monitoring and gauging. Included in GRB.

**Habitat Division Establishment (POP 112 as REQUESTED in the ARB, \$1,467,894, 7 positions):**

WaterWatch supports the funding requested under the ARB to establish the Habitat Division. A Habitat Division would bring habitat staff together within a single division to lead proactive, focused and consistent statewide efforts to protect, restore and enhance habitat for Oregon's fish and wildlife. As requested in the ARB, POP 112 would fund 5 new habitat biologists necessary to make the newly proposed Habitat Division effective, as well as 2 administrative staff. The GRB does not include the 5 biologists; it only includes the administrative staff. In order to ensure that the new Habitat Division is successful in its mission to protect fish and wildlife habitat, the biologist positions are critical. As such, we would urge the Ways and Means Committee to fund the full request as found in the ARB. We would also urge these be funded with General Funds.

**Conclusion:** Eighteen out of nineteen of Oregon's river basins are already over appropriated from the late spring to the early fall. At the same time, population growth and climate change are increasing pressures on Oregon's rivers and other aquatic habitats. Oregon's fish and other aquatic species across the state are imperiled; climate change will only make the challenges Oregon's aquatic species are facing worse. In the face of these increasing pressures, protection of Oregon's iconic fish and wildlife, and the habitats they depend on, is more important than ever. As such we would urge the Ways and Means Committee to invest in these POPS critical to their survival.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "K. Priestley", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Kimberley Priestley, Sr. Policy Analyst  
WaterWatch of Oregon