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May 2, 2020

Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Natural Resources

Testimony on HB 5009: Department of Fish and Wildlife Budget

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Co-Chair Taylor, Co-Chair Reardon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on HB 5009, the budget for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) for the 2021-23 biennium.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a science-based, non-partisan organization committed to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Oregon, TNC has over 80,000 supporters and members in every county. Based in communities around the state, we manage lands and waters in varied ecosystems and partner with ranchers, farmers, fishers, timber and environmental interests on some of the most challenging conservation issues facing people and nature.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife is a driver of Oregon's conservation strategy, overseeing Oregon's engagement in maintaining the health of species across the state in marine reserves and rocky shores, forests and wetlands, and grasslands and the sagebrush steppe. ODFW needs adequate funding to carry out its statewide mission. As in several other natural resource agencies, we note the proposed fund shifts to federal dollars, and encourage the legislature to ensure that these transitions do not hamper the ability for affected programs and positions to achieve funding certainty once the state receives full federal guidance on the receipt of ARPA dollars or other federal funds.

We would like to highlight several funding items for your consideration:

Support Policy Option Packages included in the Governor's Recommended Budget:

- **POP 105 – Culvert Repair for Fish Passage.** This transfer of funds from ODOT to ODFW addresses blocked passage from culverts on roads. We'd note that ODOT also owns some tide gates and should be eligible for funding as needed.
- **POP 112 - Habitat Division.** We support the re-creation of this division, its focus on 21st century habitat problems and the project-level coordination and expertise needed to solve them. While we understand that most programs within ODFW have a habitat interface and not all could be brought within this division, we encourage thorough coordination with other related programs, particularly regarding marine reserves and rocky habitats and the conservation strategy program.
- **POP 117 – Good Neighbor Authority Coordinator.** This capacity within the agency will expand collaboration with our federal partners in forest, rangeland and watershed restoration, and help ensure that wildlife goals don't run at cross-purposes with restoration and fire objectives.

Fund the following proposals not included in the GRB:

- **POP 100: Oregon Conservation Strategy Wildlife Biologists.** Funded primarily through the Farm Bill and NRCS, the implementation of these habitat conservation programs is hindered by a personnel gap. Additional biological expertise would provide significant support in implementing the Conservation Strategy and reduce the possibility of federal ESA listings of species including the greater sage-grouse.
- **POP 103 – Klamath Basin Fish Biologist.** Reintroduction of anadromous fish into the upper Klamath basin is a principal goal of the Yurok, Karuk, and Klamath Tribes, many conservation organizations, and commercial fishing interests. Per a 2008 Commission decision, ODFW is required to develop and complete the implementation phase of this effort. The fish biologist funded by this POP is critical to Klamath dam removal efforts and is charged with developing the reintroduction plan and assisting with monitoring and implementation of the plan upon its completion.
- **POP 122 – Technical Assistance for Tidegate Partnership.** Additional staff capacity would allow this program to better address the critical need of repairing and replacing failing tide gates, supporting farmers and ranchers while achieving the restoration of tidal wetlands salmon need to thrive.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued attention to the needs of Oregon's natural environments.